


AN AMERICAN GIRL IN INDIA



A & B

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AN AMERICAN GIRL IN INDIA

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A NOVEL

BY

SHELLAND BRADLEY

AUTHOR OF

'THE DOINGS OF BERENGARIA'

THIRD IMPRESSION



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AN AMERICAN GIRL IN INDIA

CHAPTER I

MYSELF, AUNT AGATHA, AND SOME OTHERS

Now if you expect to find this book just chock-a-block with American expressions and reeking with an accent, I guess you will be disappointed. I had best tell you straight away that I am not one of the forge-ahead kind of American, who go about with a twang and a guide book, armed with an umbrella to chip off bits of stone from Westminster Abbey and such like places to carry home west as trophies. And I don't love particularly Paris nor catch right on to people straight away.

You see, it was like this. My father died when I was at the fascinating age of four. He wore a thick gold watch chain, and was very fat—that, I am sorry to say, is all I can remember of him. He was rich, too, though what he made his money in I have never to this day been able to discover. Mother is not just exactly communicative about my father. Perhaps that's because she has married again. My step-father is quite well-known in the political world,

and my mother some day, they say, will get him made Secretary of State for something or other—I forget just what—war, I think, but I’m not quite sure. Anyway, he’s had enough experience in domestic strife, if that’s any use. My mother and he really get on together quite well, but you wouldn’t think they did if you lived next door to them in a semi-detached villa with rather thin walls. You see, they are both just gone on argument, and they both appear on platforms—fortunately, both on the same side—in public, and so they like to get all the practice they can at home. My mother was a great social-political light before she married my step-father, and they do say she married him just to get an assured position in the government.

Well, you see, my mother having married an Englishman, we—that’s my sister Dorothy, Bob, and myself—have been brought up mostly in England, and so we don’t speak much American. I guess it’s only at times when I get just wild that I speak any at all.

It was a glorious afternoon in late September, and we—Aunt Agatha, Dorothy, Bob, and myself—were sitting in the drawing-room at Seldon after lunch. Mother and her political appendage, as a facetious member of the opposition once dubbed my step-father, were away shooting up in Scotland, and Aunt Agatha was left in charge of us, and Tony—principally of Tony. If at the obnoxious age of seven one child can be more obnoxious than another, that child is Tony. I had thought of leaving him out of this narrative altogether, but

on second thoughts I have decided just to mention him and pass on as quickly as possible. I always think it is best to be candid, and when you have got an obnoxious step-brother, named Tony, aged seven, to own up to him right away. Tony, I am bound to say, has as little love for me as I have for him, though why that should be I am sure I cannot say, since I never slap him or speak severely to him—except when he thoroughly deserves it. Only that very morning he had been particularly provoking.

‘Father will be made a peer soon,’ he had said jeeringly, as he had said fifty times before, ‘then I shall be the Honourable, but you won’t,’ pointing his finger at me rudely. ‘You’ll never be Honourable.’

Now owing to the fundamental laws of the British Constitution this was true, and therefore more especially annoying. I don’t at all mind confessing that I should dearly love to be the Honourable if I can’t get anything better. I am not often, however, provoked into a retort when Tony refers to this, but that morning I had been.

‘You forget the proverb “Handsome is as handsome does,”’ I said impressively, though feeling that the saying was rather trite.

Tony chuckled.

‘Oh my!’ he sniggered, retreating first to a safe distance like the little coward he is, ‘I’d go and try and do something handsome then if I was you.’

What could one do to a boy like that save ignore him—whenever he would let you. There were

times when he made it impossible for you even to do that. This afternoon was certainly one of them.

I had just been reading out a portion of a letter I had received that morning from Berengaria Hugesson-Willoughby, asking me to go out to India to spend the winter with her, including the Great Durbar which even then was beginning to swallow up as a topic of conversation all other events past, present, and to come. Berengaria—so called by her godfather and godmothers in her baptism, for which act she has ever shown marked ingratitude—is a first cousin of ours once removed, and about ten years ago she had married a man who is something or other in India—I forget what, but Aunt Agatha would be sure to know. We were all discussing the advisability of my accepting her invitation.

Aunt Agatha suddenly raised her eyes from the woollen muffler she has been knitting for the last two years for a deep sea fisherman, and looked at me with an air of finality.

‘You had best go right away now you have got the chance,’ she said, and immediately resumed her work of charity with an air of having once and for all closed the discussion.

Now I have long noticed as an indisputable fact that when Aunt Agatha says one should do a thing one generally does it. Not that I am at all of a weak disposition or easily led—my worst enemy could not call me that—but there are some people who have an indefinable air of command about them. My Aunt Agatha certainly has. Unkind people,

in fact, don't hesitate to call her domineering, and it has been whispered around that her departed husband, to whom she always now refers as 'poor dear,' deserved that sympathetic appellation much more during his lifetime than he possibly could do now. And they do say that the poor dear man's favourite text was that about there being in Heaven no marrying and giving in marriage. Yet he left Aunt Agatha all that he possessed on condition that she never married again. I'm inclined to believe that he did that out of right-down kindness of heart for his fellow men. Anyway, it has effectively kept Aunt Agatha from entering the bonds of matrimony a second time. Say, though, this is pure gossip, and my Aunt Agatha is really a very good sort—when you know her well.

'I only just wish I had the chance,' said Dorothy languidly. Nobody ever takes any notice of what Dorothy says. Her only claim to fame is that she has married a baronet and got the only title so far in the family. This way—so says the British Constitution—she takes precedence of her own mother, and you can imagine how mother likes that. My step-father is being continually urged to buck up and get something or other to set things right, but baronets have been looking up a lot lately, I'm told, and it isn't so easy to get past them now as it used to be. Anyway, nothing but a peerage or the Privy Council, I am told, will do the trick, and I doubt if my step-father's cute enough for that. So Dorothy remains on top. Dorothy has also had twins twice. I can't think of anything

more to say about her. It is always best to begin by being candid, even about one's own sister.

'You'll be a fool if you don't go,' said Bob in his downright way, taking his feet from the mantelshelf and pushing back his chair. Bob also believes in being candid. It's his chief characteristic next to his love for the mantelshelf. If ever my brother Bob sees a mantelshelf anywhere round about he just goes right there for it straight away, and manages to get his feet on to it somehow. All men love mantelshelves, but an Englishman leans his back against them, while an American uses them as a foot-rest. I suppose they both get equally warm in the same way with a difference.

'You go,' said Tony, in his most unflattering manner. He was lying full length on the floor and looking up at me with that rude disconcerting stare of his.

Since they were all so unanimous I began to think there must be something in it. Now I am not really at all an undecided sort of person, but I'm bound to confess here that I did just hesitate. You see, there was so much to be said on either side. Of course, there were disadvantages in leaving home for such a long time. It meant missing a whole host of engagements already booked for the winter, and it was an appallingly long journey, and I am not quite sure that I am a good sailor. And I am bound to confess that I had not had any great weakness for India so far. I'm the sort of person that likes things comfortable, and I rather guessed India was the sort of place where your hair wouldn't

curl, and you had to reduce your luggage into a sort of knapsack, where there wasn't any room for frills at all, and where you were hoisted about on elephants and camels and had to be very nippy to escape wild beasts and snakes and all manner of creepy things, and from the pictures I had seen I was quite certain that a *topi* wouldn't suit me, and I admit that I'm inclined to get freckles in the sun. Still, it wasn't to be denied that going out to India for the winter had its advantages too. I'm a great believer in the power of absence. Of course, it must be discreet and well-timed. You must ring the curtain up and down with all the worldly wisdom that you have. You must disappear exactly at the right moment and with a certain amount of noise, or your exit won't have the desired effect, and, awful and humiliating calamity, it may even pass unnoticed. And as for your reappearance, that requires even more diplomacy. To turn up right down suddenly, like Anne Boleyn, and find Jane Seymour sitting on your husband's knee, would stump most people, and doesn't tend towards a friendly family reunion. Now if Anne Boleyn could have managed to come in soft and melting like when Henry was alone and hadn't seen a skirt for twenty-four hours—though I admit this would have been difficult, Henry being what he was—who knows what a happy, loving couple they might not have been ever afterwards, not to speak of there being four Queens less in history to tax the memory of all the generations that came after. Say, though, I'm shying off the main point.

Now to tell you the truth—didn't I say I was always candid?—I had just about that time begun to think that a little absence on my part would not be at all a bad thing. You see, it was like this. I was a bit down on my luck just then. I was near about celebrating, or rather trying to hush up as close as an affectionate family would let me, another of those annually recurring nuisances—a birthday, and I was beginning to feel that the time was coming when vulgar-minded people would be talking of me as no 'chicken,' 'getting on,' 'long in the tooth,' 'not so young as she was,' or 'never see this side of thirty again.' Now, no woman can look on calmly and hear herself called things like that. It isn't in the blood. Of course it takes different women different ways. Some descend to charity and the curate straight away. Others hang on and get resigned, while others again take to art and make an uphill fight of it. Now I was still enough of a 'chicken' not to have come to the parting of the ways as yet. But I could see them looming on ahead, and I recognised now that the only chance of escape was by the help of man. But that was just where the difficulty lay. It wasn't that there was any lack of men. I had had at least half a dozen proposals every year for the last—but no, I won't say how many years. It's a mistake to be too candid about a thing like that. One must retain a little reticence somewhere. The fact was that men who proposed, or tried to propose, had long since bored me. It's all very well up to a certain point, but I had got to that stage now that

as soon as I saw it in a man's eye that he was going to propose, I lost interest in him right away. Yet illogically I am bound to confess that I was a bit upset by the fact that I had only had two proposals that year—and the month was September. How like a woman, Bob would say. But I had better admit the truth right here and say that it was just the one man I thought I should like to have propose to me who hadn't shown any intention of actually doing it so far. Whether I was really in love with him at this time or not, it beats me to say. Love is a funny elusive sort of thing that I hadn't had much truck with hitherto. Fact was, doubtless, I only felt a bit piqued because he hadn't done what all the others had.

'What!' said Bob, planting himself in front of me in his abrupt way, 'haven't you made up your mind yet?'

'No,' I said hesitatingly, with a horrible feeling that Bob was reading the innermost recesses of my mind, and knew what was there better than I did myself.

Bob chuckled.

'Ah,' he said, 'I suppose now it comes to the point you're sorry to leave——'

'Lord Hendley,' announced the footman, throwing open the door.

I am afraid I was weak enough to give a start of surprise. Bob deliberately winked at me, while his face was screwed into an expression of intense amusement. What about I am sure I don't know. But then Bob is only nineteen. One is so easily amused at the age of nineteen.

Aunt Agatha received Lord Hendley graciously, Dorothy shook hands with a society simulation of polite interest, Bob hailed him with boyish heartiness that in another rank of life would have expressed itself in a slap on the back, and I—well I, of course, received him just as I should have done fifty other young men of our acquaintance. Lord Hendley sat down and politely began to talk to Aunt Agatha, who was doing hostess, and then almost at once other visitors were announced. I saw Lord Hendley look over at the sofa where I was sitting, and felt sure he was just going to make straight for it when Bob planted himself right in between us, and began telling him about a model of a yacht he was building, and asking him to go up to his room to see it. And of course Lord Hendley had to go. He and Bob are great friends, but there are times when I feel I have no sisterly love at all for Bob. I'm not at all sure that he didn't carry Lord Hendley off on purpose.

For quite twenty minutes I made myself pleasant to really very uninteresting people, and then at last they returned. I felt that Lord Hendley might reasonably have got away from looking at the model of a yacht in less than twenty minutes, so as the couch where I sat held two, I got up and walked to the other side of the room and took a chair near by Lady Manifold. Lord Hendley came up and joined us without the least hesitation. Dorothy was talking to Marjory Manifold close by, and Bob was hovering round with cakes and things, so we formed quite a

little group in that corner of the drawing-room. Suddenly—I don't quite know why—I made up my mind.

'I'm going out to India for the Durbar,' I said. I was looking straight at Lady Manifold, yet I could feel that everyone round gave a movement of surprise.

'My dear, how charming!' said Lady Manifold. 'We are going too. You must come by our boat.'

'I should like that immensely,' I replied, feeling that my decision was quite irrevocable now. 'I was just wondering with whom I should make the journey.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Lady Manifold, and Marjory expressed herself duly pleased also. We at once entered into details.

'Everyone seems to be going to the great Durbar,' said Lord Hendley, leaning forward, and taking advantage of the first pause in the conversation. 'It will be very jolly meeting so many old friends there.'

Everyone looked round at Lord Hendley.

'Are you going too?' asked Lady Manifold, with what I thought undue animation. I always had suspected that Lady Manifold had designs for Marjory upon Lord Hendley, though I knew quite well that Marjory's affections were engaged elsewhere.

'Oh yes, I'm going,' said Lord Hendley. I glanced at him quickly. I felt certain that he looked a bit self-conscious. I wondered if his decision to go to the great Durbar had been as suddenly taken as mine had been.

'What boat are you going by?' I asked casually.

‘We’re going by the *Arethusa*,’ said Lady Manifold promptly, again I thought with an undue show of interest. It was practically suggesting that he should take the same boat.

‘Really, how strange,’ said Lord Hendley, with his pleasant smile. ‘I have decided to go by the *Arethusa* too.’

‘Have you booked your passage?’ asked Bob, pausing with a plate of cakes in his hand and a sinister gleam of mischief in his eyes.

Lord Hendley shot a murderous glance in his direction.

‘No,’ he said hurriedly; ‘but there will be no difficulty.’

‘The boats are very full, I believe,’ I remarked, showing no particular interest.

‘One can always get in somewhere,’ he said, still with an eye on Bob, whom he also doubtless felt to be designing pitfalls for the unwary.

The conversation seemed somehow to me to be fraught with danger, and I wondered if the others noticed it. I looked at the twinkle in Bob’s eyes and felt that a brotherless state has its compensations. I began to have that uncomfortable feeling known as ‘hot all over.’ But there was a new danger advancing in the rear that I hadn’t noticed up till then. Tony, after watching me with solemn eyes from a distance, had crawled along the floor and established himself beside my chair almost hidden from the rest of the group.

‘Beetroot,’ I heard him say suddenly in a sort of chuckling whisper.

I half turned and looked down at him.

‘Beetroot,’ he said again, regarding me solemnly. ‘Beetroot.’

I frowned at him under cover of the general conversation, not grasping in the least what he meant, but from long experience of him suspicious of something evil.

‘Tomatoes?’ He shook his head gravely. ‘No, deeper than that.’ He placed a finger first on one side of his face and then on the other, fixing me with his eyes. ‘Beetroot,’ he nodded meaningly, ‘beetroot.’

Then I saw what he meant, and if I had slain him straight away no jury of twelve honest British shopkeepers would have called it anything but justifiable homicide. Now, I admit that I do get hot at times. It’s one of my great grievances. But I had always tried to delude myself into the belief that I only got a becoming colour, though secretly conscious all the time that rude people might have called it ‘flushed.’ But to be told straight out that you looked like beetroot! What woman could take calmly being told that her complexion was an awful colour like that? Of course it was only Tony. But, still, I knew that wretched little children of that age do somehow often manage to strike the truth. I was so dreadfully overcome that I took no notice of what people were saying until I suddenly heard Bob’s voice with that particularly innocent, guileless note in it that I always knew meant mischief. He was smiling, too, in a nasty will-you-walk-into-my-parlour sort of way.

‘When does the *Arethusa* sail?’ he asked, looking straight at Lord Hendley, pinning him down to an answer, as it were.

Lord Hendley almost lost his presence of mind, and got up to go.

‘The beginning of November,’ he said hastily, as he went across to shake hands with Lady Manifold.

‘Oh no,’ the latter said, retaining his hand in hers in her surprise. ‘The *Arethusa* doesn’t sail till the 29th.’

There was a pause. Then I created a diversion. I upset my cup of tea. It was very foolish of me, but Tony and Bob together had been too much for me. I was rather glad that some of the tea did fall on my dress, so that no one could say that I had upset the cup on purpose to cover Lord Hendley’s confusion.

Lord Hendley helped me to remove the stains, then he held out his hand to say good-bye.

‘We ought to have a very jolly voyage,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ I murmured demurely, ‘at the beginning of November.’

CHAPTER II

ERMYNTRUDE AND I SET OUT

‘ERMYNTRUDE,’ I said, going up to my room to dress for dinner as soon as the last of the visitors had gone, and finding my maid awaiting me, ‘we start for India at the end of November.’

‘Oh, miss,’ said Ermyntrude, collapsing dramatically on the edge of a box, with her hand on the place where she fondly imagined her heart to be ; ‘oh, miss, it ’ave always been my ambition to visit that savage land.’

‘Good gracious, Ermyntrude !’ I laughed, yet suddenly feeling somehow as if I were setting out on an adventurous Captain-Cook-like journey among the cannibals ; ‘it isn’t a bit savage nowadays.’

Ermyntrude got up in her prim, decided sort of way, and busied herself at the toilet-table.

‘Well, I can only say what I ’ave heard,’ she said in a gently defensive, remonstrating sort of voice. ‘But my Uncle Ebby, he was out in the Mutiny, you may remember or you may not, miss ; anyway, the doings of them natives he had to tell of was most horrifying.’

‘Oh yes,’ I said cheerfully ; ‘but that was long ago in the Mutiny. Everything has changed since then. All the natives are quite friendly now.’

But Ermyntrude always does see the gloomy side of things.

‘Don’t you trust them, miss,’ Ermyntrude warned me solemnly as she helped me into a dressing-gown. ‘Take my word, and don’t you trust them, the Begums least of all, miss.’

‘The Begums !’ Ermyntrude’s unsuspected acquaintance with those ladies and the depth of personal feeling she put into her condemnation of them surprised the query out of me.

‘Yes, miss ; if it hadn’t been for the wicked perfidy of one of those Begums, I might have been a lady, driving about in a carriage and pair like you, miss.’ Ermyntrude paused impressively midway between the wardrobe and the bed, my dinner dress poised aloft in her hands.

Now, it isn’t often that I encourage Ermyntrude. But the connection between a Begum of the Purple East and my good plain English maid was irresistible. I let her tell me the story as her deft fingers rearranged my hair.

‘Uncle Ebby—you have heard me speak of him, miss—he was a man that everybody trusted. You’d trust him with everything you had, miss, as soon as look at him. Well, one of those Begums had got to hear of him and his noble character, and being frightened like, with so many mutineers about, she sends for him, and when she sees him she takes to him at once.’ Ermyntrude paused effectively to

survey her handiwork, and became discursive. 'You see, Uncle Ebby was a very handsome man, miss. I always grudged that I didn't take more after him myself; you'd never take me for kin of his, miss. It's my sister Beatrice what takes after him—you've never seen my sister Beatrice, have you, miss?' Ermyntrude paused again, as if to recover the thread of her story. 'Well, as I was saying, the Begum takes a great fancy to my Uncle Ebby, and after a bit she tells him that she will marry him, and tell him where all her treasure is, if he can manage to get her away to a holy place close by, where she thought she would be safe. You see, miss, this was quite right and proper. Uncle Ebby wouldn't have done anything that wasn't. The Begum was a widow, though her husband, it's true, had only been killed a few days before by some of the mutineers who had a spite against him. Well, by great efforts Uncle Ebby managed to get her away to her holy place, and she most faithfully promises to marry him next day and tell him where her treasure is. But what do you think, miss?' Ermyntrude dramatically put the finishing touches to my coiffure and drew back. 'Why, when he wakes up next morning, there she was a-burning of 'erself on a 'eap of wood.'

Ermyntrude's aspirates always will go when she gets excited.

'Dear me, Ermyntrude,' I said, surprised at this sudden and unexpected ending to the story. 'Why did she do that?'

'Well, you see, miss,' Ermyntrude explained, re-

covering her composure and her aspirates at the same time, 'it seems that she had wanted to burn herself on what they calls the funereal pyre when her husband died, but them officers in charge was too keen on the watch to let her do that, so she made use of my Uncle Ebby to get away and do it on the quiet ; and she promising all the time to marry him and give him all her treasure. Oh, I've no faith in Begums after that, miss, and it isn't to be expected, neither.'

Ermyntrude's lips closed with the firm snap of disapproval that I knew so well.

Poor dear Ermyntrude has no sense of humour. I don't believe she has ever seen anything funny in life right straight away from the time that she was born. Ermyntrude takes herself seriously. Therefore, like all other people who take themselves seriously, she furnishes a constant fund of merriment to those more fortunate beings blessed with the joyous gift of an eye to the lighter side of things.

Her name straight away strikes one as a bit incongruous when one looks at my eminently respectable maid-like maid. Now, if her godfathers and godmothers in her baptism could only have had visions of what manner of woman she would be when she grew up, they couldn't possibly have called her Ermyntrude. I do think it is such a mistake to label people for life before they've had time to show what they are going to be like. You take a wretched puling infant, just like fifty thousand other wretched infants, and you go and fix it for life with some sort

of name that you think sounds pretty, or that its grandmother or its maiden aunt had, quite oblivious of the fact that Nature may not have intended it for anything of the kind. It is just as if you took the seeds in your garden and as soon as you saw the first tiny green shoots come up, you said, 'Now I'll call these violets,' and you went on calling them violets, though they would persist in growing up sunflowers. Just think of the unfortunate Hermiones, Rosemaries, Beatrices, and Alexandras that one meets whom Nature never intended for any such high-flown appellations, and they can't, poor things, possibly live up to them, however much they try. It's like the jackdaw in the peacock's feathers. It's quite pathetic. While, as for the charming, tall, and graceful girls who are doomed to go through life as Emmas, Janes, Sarahs, and Jemimas, it's really tragic. Aunt Agatha has very strong ideas on this subject, though I'm bound to say they are not quite mine. It was owing to my impulsive defence of a maid called 'Glory' whom Aunt Agatha wanted to rechristen Emma, more suitably to her rank in life, that I found myself later on bound down to Ermyntrude.

It was like this. The first maid with whom Aunt Agatha started life had been most appropriately named Emma. Aunt Agatha thought that a very good and suitable name for a maid, and so when the first one left and she was appointing another, she had told her in her downright way :

'I don't care what your name is. My last maid's name was Emma. I'm accustomed to Emma, and

I think it's a very good name for a maid, so I shall call you Emma.'

I was only a child at that time, but even now I remember how Aunt Agatha looked at the new maid over her glasses, in that awe-inspiring, contradict-me-not sort of way of hers, and how the new maid, doubtless taken aback a bit at being rechristened after coming to years of discretion, had meekly retired, murmuring acquiescence. I had found out afterwards, though, that she could lay claim to nothing better than Sarah Jane, and I suppose she thought Emma as good as that any day, and that it wasn't worth making a fuss about. But only a short time before Ermyntrode appeared on the scene Aunt Agatha had been engaging another new maid. She had had quite half a dozen all rechristened Emma—since Sarah Jane, alias Emma number two. I'm bound to admit that maids didn't just cotton on to Aunt Agatha's ways, somehow. As I said before, you have to get to know Aunt Agatha, and I can imagine she would be particularly trying if you weren't in a position to answer back. Anyway, I had happened to be present when she was engaging the latest new maid. Aunt Agatha had offered her liberal wages, and it was all nicely settled, when Aunt Agatha dismissed her with what was evidently her little formula.

'I don't care what your name is. I've always called my maids Emma. I'm used to it, and I think it a very good name for a maid, so I shall call you Emma.'

Aunt Agatha had looked again over her spectacles

in a decisive sort of way that implied dismissal. But this maid wasn't going to be called Emma quite so easily.

'If you please, ma'am, my name's Glory,' she said meekly, yet not without a touch of obstinacy.

Aunt Agatha had looked up surprised and indignant.

'A most unsuitable name,' she said severely. 'I shall call you Emma.'

But that maid was evidently roused.

'I can't go against my godfather and godmothers in my baptism, ma'am, and go about masquerading under another name,' she had remonstrated. 'It wouldn't be right, nohow.'

Now, if there is one thing that Aunt Agatha hates it is opposition. If a look could have withered up the poor offending Glory, hers would have done it.

'You will either be "Emma" in my service or any absurd name you like outside it.' Aunt Agatha fixed her with a haughty stare through her lorgnettes.

'I'm Glory,' was all the maid said sullenly.

'Well, go there, then,' was what Aunt Agatha looked, but, of course, being a lady, she didn't say it. Sometimes Aunt Agatha has wonderful self-control. It all depends upon whether she remembers her dignity or not in time. All she said now was : 'Go to the housekeeper's room and think it over for half an hour, then come and tell me.' And such is human nature that, after that half-hour's cogitation, Glory came back Emma, which she has ever since remained. Whether a good name weighed little

in comparison with the flesh-pots of Egypt, or whether she thought of the rose, and philosophically asked with the poet, 'What's in a name?' lies hidden among the many mysteries of the house-keeper's room.

Now, during that half-hour when the fate of Glory hovered in the balance, I had mildly expostulated with Aunt Agatha.

'When the poor girl's name is Glory,' I had said, 'why on earth can't you call her Glory? She can't help her name being what it is.'

Well, I needn't tell you right here what Aunt Agatha replied, first upon the subject of the presumption of nieces, then upon the presumption of the lower classes, and finally upon the criminal idiotcy of godfathers and godmothers in general. Anyway, the consequence of my defence of Glory was this. Aunt Agatha happened to be present a short time later when I was engaging Ermyntrude. We had fixed up everything most satisfactorily, and she was just leaving the room when I thought to ask her what her Christian name was.

'Ermyntrude, miss,' she had replied in her prim, demure way.

I admit I got a bit of a shock. She hadn't just exactly prepared one for a name like that.

Aunt Agatha was looking at me with a malicious sort of smile, and her mouth pursed up.

'All right, Ermyntrude,' I had said, and Ermyntrude had demurely retired.

'You don't mean to say,' burst out Aunt Agatha as soon as the door was closed, 'that you are going

to call that eminently plain and respectable-looking young person Ermyntrude ?’

Now, in view of my expressed opinion in the Glory-Emma incident, what could I do but stoutly stand by Ermyntrude ? Though I don’t mind admitting that in the privacy of my room I approached Ermyntrude cautiously as to whether she had any other Christian name.

‘Oh yes, two others, miss,’ she had replied, with something of pride in her voice, ‘Victoria Alexandrina, miss.’

At that I had collapsed and hung on to Ermyntrude. So Ermyntrude she remains to this day.

But in spite of what Aunt Agatha said about it being impossible to expect anything sensible from a girl with a high-flown name like that, Ermyntrude is eminently practical, and has never foolishly tried to live up to her splendid appellations. She had proved herself invaluable, and when I suddenly decided to go out to India, I mentally decided at one and the same time to take her with me.

Those two months before the end of November seemed just to fly. Ermyntrude was in her element packing up. But she never quite understood why I wanted all my smartest things. A *topi*, a white umbrella tied with green, and something cool, was all she thought necessary. In that savage land what did it matter ? It was only with the greatest difficulty that I got her to pack some winter things which she thought quite insane to take to a land where the natives went unclothed. I confess that we both bought *topis*, and to our great surprise

rather fancied ourselves in them. Of these *topis*, alas ! more anon.

And so after many days of much talk and anticipation, of much contradictory advice from friends, of much bustle and preparation, there we were saying good-bye at Charing Cross Station.

Charing Cross Station that morning didn't seem to know itself. I guess there's always a bit of life to be seen round about there, but that Thursday morning must have gone just right away with the record. It looked as if all London were at home there, and the guests had been asked to bring along with them all the luggage they possessed. Porters darted here, there, and everywhere amongst the crowd struggling along under huge trunks that contained the finery that was to rival even the gorgeous East, or wheeling about smooth-running trucks that threatened to topple over from a superfluity of many boxes, neatly poised. Trim-looking maids and irreproachable valets for once forgot their breeding, and rushed distracted through the crowd. Only Ermyntrude remained serene.

It was a real fine crowd. Smart young men in well-built frock coats and top-hats gossiped with smarter women, in suitable or unsuitable travelling costume, as the case might be. Fond mammas wore a slightly worried look, while charming daughters grew flushed with the excitement attendant on the start on such a journey of exploration to an unknown land. Ubiquitous aunts and cousins showed up in full force, and made of it a field-day.

I guess no one who saw me that morning will deny

that I looked just as smart as anybody there. Now, I always make a point of dressing suitably. When I go to a garden-party, I do the thing properly in lace and furbelows. When I cycle, I do it in a neat white drill or blue serge skirt ; and when I travel, I don't look as if I were going to a church parade in Hyde Park. Some people have no idea of the fitness of things. Now, there was Marjory Manifold, got up as if she were going to a first-class wedding in Hanover Square, when, in reality, she was going on a dirty Dover-Calais boat, where she would probably be very ill, and then on the most disarranging journey possible at bone-shaking speed across France. I smiled as I thought of Marjory in that get-up a few hours hence. Now, I was dressed in dark blue cloth, plain, but well made—anybody could see that—and a simple black hat with feathers, and a fur boa, and, above all, I had that pleasing glow that comes only from the consciousness of being well dressed. I ask any woman, Is there any feeling that bucks you up like that ? Now Lady Manifold had gone to the other extreme. She was one of that very large class of Britons who think anything good enough for a journey, and she must have routed out all the oldest things that she possessed. The worst of it was that her things fitted her so badly that they looked as if they could not possibly have been made for her, and that absurd little straw hat, thirty years too young for her, might easily have been one that Marjory had no longer any use for. How Marjory could have allowed her to come out like that I can't imagine. I was quite

glad she kept inside the carriage, and didn't join our group on the platform. I've no use for an ill-dressed woman.

We certainly had a very jolly group. Lots of friends had come to see us off. Aunt Agatha, Dorothy and Bob, of course, were there, and half a dozen young men of various degrees of uninterestingness (I don't believe there is such a word as that, but there ought to be). Major Mackworth, whom I had had great difficulty in preventing proposing to me for quite a long time, was hanging round, but I felt I needn't keep my eye on him now, as he couldn't do much on a crowded platform like that. I talked most to Captain Sewell, of the Rangers. If I had been born a German *fräulein*, I think I should have admired Captain Sewell, of the Rangers. He was rather like a bull-dog, very broad, very strong, very military, with a waxed moustache, and very tight clothes, and a general braced-up sort of look. He hadn't much conversation, but what he had was amusing, because he took himself seriously. Captain Sewell, like Ermyntrude, has no sense of humour.

'London will be quite empty this afternoon,' he was saying, looking round with the kind of air that was capable of ignoring millions.

'Oh, but you'll be here,' I said, with obvious mockery.

'But I shall not,' he said seriously. 'I leave town at once for Scotland. Can't stand London empty.'

'You should have come to the great Durbar,' I

said, with a smile, trying to look as if I hadn't seen Lord Hendley pushing his way towards us through the crowd.

Captain Sewell's doubtless valuable reply was lost in a sudden commotion from behind. Lady Manifold had put her head—surmounted by the absurd straw hat—out of the carriage window, and was loudly declaring the necessity of sending off a telegram at once, before the train left. She wore a worried look.

'Quick, Marjory, get me a telegraph-form out of my dressing-bag,' she was saying.

Marjory reluctantly broke off her conversation with Mr. Lovelace and darted into the compartment. I called in after her.

'Lord Hendley will send it off,' I said, giving him a look of interrogation, and, woman-like, sending off the very man I most wanted to talk to.

'Delighted!' he murmured, but he looked anything but that as he went off with the hastily-written telegram and a sixpence. I could see him frown as he saw Charlie Danford greet me.

'Hullo!' called out that callow youth to me across a sea of heads as I stood for a moment on the steps of our compartment. 'Are you off by the Ducal train too?'

'What?' I asked, when he had managed to push his way nearer through the crowd. 'Why do you call this a Ducal train?'

'Oh, didn't you know?' he laughed, as he managed to circumvent Aunt Agatha's somewhat rotund figure, that was the last obstacle that stood

between us. 'I thought everybody knew that three Dukes and Duchesses were off by this train for the great Durbar. By Jove! here they come.' He adjusted his eyeglass critically. 'Look, I say, isn't she a ripper?'

And there, making their way through the crowd just like ordinary human beings, were the three famous Dukes and Duchesses—nay, four, as I was soon to learn from the owner of a deep bass voice on my right. He also seemed to be the owner of a pale, tired-looking little woman who was standing beside him.

'Look!' he was saying impressively, in a deep, solemn voice, that seemed to impress visibly the meek little woman—'look, there go four Dukes and four Duchesses, and—I know them all.'

To prove that he spoke the truth, he swept off his hat and got the smallest of bows from the smallest and nearest of the Duchesses. The nearest Duke, intentionally or not, looked fixedly ahead. But I found out afterwards that this was a habit of that particular Duke.

'Seven-eighths of these people have come to say good-bye to the other eighth—eh, what?' said Charlie Danford in his pleasant voice, surveying the crowd critically through his eyeglass. Nobody took any notice of the remark. Nobody ever does take any notice of what Charlie Danford says, yet he's always asked everywhere. I never could make out why. I suppose it is that he looks very well. No one could ever call Charlie Danford a cad to look at, and that's something nowadays. It's so

much better to be a nonentity than to risk being called a cad.

Just then I saw Lord Hendley coming back, pushing his way through the crowd.

'I say,' he began as soon as he could get near enough to me to speak without shouting for everyone else to hear, 'who's Tommy?'

'Tommy?' I asked, doubtless looking as puzzled as I felt.

'Yes,' he said, 'the Tommy mentioned in Lady Manifold's telegram.'

'What!' I cried, horrified. 'Do you mean to say that you read that telegram you were given to send off?'

'I had to,' he confessed, looking comically apologetic. 'They couldn't read her writing, and asked me to try and make out what it was.'

'And could you?' I was curious enough to ask.

'Well,' he laughed, 'I only hope I deciphered it right, but I made it read: "Be sure Tommy does not eat too much. His health is delicate."'

I laughed. I knew Lady Manifold's playful little habit—that occasionally became exceedingly trying to her friends—of sending off telegrams on the most impossible of subjects on every possible occasion.

'It doesn't sound right, does it?' I said. 'Poor Lady Manifold! If you've mutilated her telegram! I'm sure Tommy could never forgive the state of his health being exposed in a public telegram like that.'

'My only hope,' said Lord Hendley comically, 'is that Tommy isn't a human being.'

‘I’ll ask Marjory,’ I laughed.

I leaned across the broad shoulders of Aunt Agatha and whispered in Marjory’s ear. She was still talking to her special admirer, Mr. Lovelace.

‘Who’s Tommy?’ I asked, low enough, I thought, not to be heard by anyone else.

Mr. Lovelace, however, must have heard, because I could see him blush even though I wasn’t looking at him. Marjory blushed too, and after a quick, shy glance in his direction, frowned on me severely.

‘Oh,’ I said, without thinking, ‘is Mr. Lovelace called Tommy, too?’

Marjory looked horrified, and they both blushed again. I guess she called him Tommy when they were alone, and they both felt as if she had just been caught in the act. But Mr. Lovelace, having conquered his blushes, came gallantly to the rescue.

‘Yes,’ he said laughingly, ‘I confess to being called Tommy.’

‘Oh,’ I said, trying to make up for what I had done. ‘Being called anything ending in “Y” is a sure sign of popularity, isn’t it?’

I think Marjory felt that I was depriving her of her last few minutes’ conversation with her young man. She looked at her watch, which is always a sure sign with a woman that someone is in the way.

‘We’re due to start in five minutes,’ she said.

They were ordinary enough words, but they gave me a cold, streaky pain down the back right away. Not until then had I realised what the moment of departure would be like. I suddenly felt that I

would give anything not to be going. Lady Manifold, dowdy and fidgety, and Marjory, shallow and frivolous, all at once seemed the most undesirable of fellow-travellers, while, as for the owner of the deep bass voice, he made me feel murderous already, and the meek little woman who looked up at him admiringly I felt inclined to shake right away. The Delhi Durbar suddenly appeared to me to be what some of the papers had called it—a useless expenditure and an empty circus show. I saw all the tawdriness and glitter of it in a flash.

‘Yes,’ Lord Hendley was saying, ‘one has heard so much of the Durbar, I hope you won’t be disappointed.’

Lord Hendley has a most embarrassing habit of apparently reading one’s thoughts—or, rather, I should say my thoughts, for, of course, I’ve never discussed the subject with anybody else. I never mention Lord Hendley’s name to anyone if I can help it, and I always turn kind of hot if I hear it mentioned suddenly. I wonder if that really means anything?

I believe I should have got quite guppy in the throat just then, but, fortunately, a whistle blew and saved me. Immediately there was a general bustle on the platform, and everybody began to kiss everybody else—I mean, of course, all those who were within the table of consanguinity. Those who couldn’t kiss began to shake hands hurriedly, and the air was full of last messages and injunctions from fond and anxious friends and relatives. Aunt Agatha was, of course, well to the fore here, and

would keep talking about something flannel. I grew quite hot when she made me assure her in a stage whisper that I had them on.

I always do hate these occasions. People get so excited, and seem to lose all self-control in a sort of kissing, handshaking scrimmage. I feel like Bob, who says he's so awfully afraid of being kissed by somebody by mistake in the general confusion of the moment. Bob always says he hates kissing, but he insisted on saluting me heartily on both cheeks now. 'Just to make old Hendley jealous,' he whispered, as he gave me the second with quite unnecessary emphasis. Bob has such ridiculous ideas, though I did once know a husband who was jealous of his wife being kissed by her brother. But I have an idea that some brothers-in-law must be real irritating. I feel sure my husband, if I ever have one, will find Bob so.

'You are sure you haven't forgotten the meat lozenges and the chlorodyne and the quinine?' he asked as he released me. That was purely to annoy me. He knew that I had only taken them under protest when Aunt Agatha had finally declared that she wouldn't sleep at nights with me so far away unless she knew that I was provided with them and several other things.

Lord Hendley looked at me for a moment without speaking as we shook hands.

Then, I don't know how it was, I did just the stupidest thing possible. I had known for some time that he couldn't come with us to India as he had suddenly announced his intention of doing that

afternoon at tea, but I had determined to show him that I wasn't interested in his coming or not coming either way by not asking him what prevented him. And then at the very last moment, like an idiot, I blurted it out before I knew what I was saying. 'Why aren't you coming?' I asked. I always did hate parting like this in public. I get somehow right down caught up and whirled around, and invariably say the wrong thing.

'Oh,' he said, brightening up wonderfully, 'I hope to come out later, but a reason that I'm not at liberty to give yet prevents my coming just now.'

'A State secret, I suppose?' I said, feeling just mad with myself when I saw how pleased he was that I had asked him that question. I guess he thought I was sorry he wasn't coming, and, of course, I didn't want him to think that.

Another whistle, more confusion.

He leaned slightly towards me.

'Yes,' he said quietly; 'it is a kind of State secret.'

I looked up at him quickly. He was serious.

Now, I never pretend to have any control over the expression of my eyes. I always think it best to let them be perfectly natural. But sometimes they do say things for one that one would never say in words. Of course, that may be an advantage or a disadvantage, as the case may be. I suppose they had an interrogative sort of look just now. At any rate, I could see Lord Hendley hesitate a moment. Then he bent down (have I mentioned that

he is nearly a head taller than I am ? if not, I make the humiliating confession now in brackets as quite unimportant).

‘ The Government is going to——’

Then, woman-like, I changed my mind, and didn’t want to hear.

‘ I thought,’ I said hurriedly, ‘ that it was a State secret.’

I suddenly felt that I shouldn’t respect him any more if he told me anything that really was a secret. Yet, of course, I should have been annoyed if he hadn’t offered to tell me after that interrogative look in my eyes. I have thought the whole thing out quietly since, but I haven’t yet quite made up my mind whether a woman prefers a man who won’t divulge to her a secret he ought to withhold, or the man who gives in and tells her. I’m inclined to think that she respects the former against her will, which doesn’t make the home sort of friendly, while she much prefers the latter, because she can look down upon him. There’s nothing pleases a woman so much as having something to look down upon.

‘ There are some people,’ whispered Lord Hendley, still with his head bent down towards me, ‘ that no one would expect a man to keep even a State secret from.’

My heart, I admit, went all of a flutter. Was that really equal to a proposal ? What I should have said I don’t quite know, for just then that tiresome Aunt Agatha took possession of me and bundled me into the carriage. She was murmuring

her last hurried injunctions and her firm belief in something flannel.

‘I say,’ shouted Bob over the heads of I don’t know how many people, ‘have you got the filter?’

‘Goodness gracious!’ said Aunt Agatha excitedly; ‘if you’ve forgotten that you must’—she looked round vaguely, as if for inspiration, then, brightening up—‘drink nothing but tea.’

‘Yes,’ I said gravely, ‘I’ll always drink tea when there’s no water to be got.’

But Aunt Agatha was too far gone for gentle sarcasm. I knew she was racking her brains to think of some other last injunction, and that she might break out any moment. I trembled to think to what details her mind might not descend in the final throes of parting.

I turned round hastily to escape her, and there was Lord Hendley again confronting me. Now I had said all that I had to say to Lord Hendley on a public railway platform, and I felt that if the train didn’t move off soon I should end by saying something fatuous. Was there ever anything more trying than seeing people off or being seen off one’s self at a railway-station? I don’t know which is the lesser evil. You’ve already said all you’ve got to say long before you get there, but, still, you’ve got to make idiotic remarks to fill up the time, knowing that at any moment you may be cut short in the middle of a sentence by the train moving off. You are absolutely at the mercy of that wretched train, which seems to mock you by its very uncertainty, like a puzzle to which the guard and the

driver only hold the keys. Suddenly a bell rings, and, with a sigh of relief, you ensconce your friend comfortably in the carriage. Surely the train is just off now. You look furtively along to see if the guard isn't signalling to the driver to start. But the guard is engaged in animated and prolonged conversation with the fussy old gentleman whose seat is in the last carriage. You look back quickly at your friend, who is leaning out of the window. You catch his eye and feel unhappy and foolish, having nothing more to say.

'You'll soon be off now,' you stammer confusedly, and immediately regret having said it, for fear there may be too great a note of satisfaction in your voice.

'Yes; we ought to be off now,' your friend answers fatuously, looking at his watch for the third time within the minute. Then there is another pause. That train looks as if it meant to cling to that platform till the very last gasp. You daren't look along again to find out what the guard is doing, for you are conscious that your friend is looking down on you from the carriage window. You feel desperately that you must say something else. 'You'll let me know you get home safely?' you blurt out before you remember that you've already asked that twice.

Then at last the whistle goes, and you suppress a sigh of infinite relief. Your friend sinks back into the seat.

'Now you're off,' you say, careless that you are beaming joyfully. The train actually moves.

‘Good-bye.’ ‘Good-bye.’ You feel quite yourself again, and are even prepared to walk along a few steps to smile a last adieu. Then suddenly the train stops dead, and at once you are an inane, blithering idiot again. All your newly-regained self-confidence goes, and you swear solemnly under your breath that you will never in all your life see anybody off by train again. And when it’s a real sad parting and there’s a danger of tears, then Heaven help you !

I felt that this digression on the eccentricity of starting trains was necessary to explain the fact that I found myself shaking hands with Lord Hendley for the third time. How it happened I don’t quite know. I suppose it was that I kept on forgetting to whom I had said good-bye and to whom not, and then remembering as soon as I went to say good-bye again. But I really do think any mistake is excusable on an occasion like this. Of course no one could have any desire to shake hands three times with anybody. It was pure accident, but it made me feel very silly. I guess if I’d been a servant-maid I should have giggled right there.

We were all in the carriage now, Lady Manifold, Marjory torn from the gaze of admiring Tommy Lovelace, myself, the pompous friend of Duchesses and the submissive lady, who, it was perhaps fortunate, had no one to see them off. It was enough of a block round our carriage as it was. Marjory and I filled the window, Lady Manifold sat back placidly, probably thinking of Tommy. At last, to my intense relief, the train moved. Then it stopped.

Aunt Agatha whispered quite loudly another parting injunction that she fondly thought no one else could hear. I was determined that no one should say I had given anyone the last look like the heroine in a penny novelette, so I tried to beam genially on everybody. The train moved again. I smiled round and fixed my eyes on Bob as I felt the train was really off this time. I thought he was quite safe. And he really was the last person I saw upon the platform. He was standing with his arm slipped through Lord Hendley's.

We were really out of the station. I was sinking back into my seat with a wholly exhilarating sense of relief when I heard a little gasp from the pale-faced, submissive woman, and was conscious of a slightly agitated look on the face of the pompous gentleman opposite. Then I felt it. I had sat back full and rather heavily on something that gave and squashed down flat. I suppose it was a foolish thing to do, but in the excitement of the moment I thought it least humiliating to pretend not to notice it. So I sat tight. In a moment I congratulated myself on my presence of mind. My very first thought told me it was the top-hat of the friend of Duchesses. I had noticed on the platform that he had been wearing a top-hat, and now in a furtive glance over to the other side of the carriage I saw that he was hatless, and caught no glimpse of the topper on the rack above. I sat tighter. I even smiled as I glanced unconcernedly out of the window. I felt overjoyed at the thought that I was sitting on his hat. He was a pompous, objectionable per-

son, and I felt he wanted sitting on. I was doing the next best thing to that. What right had anyone to start for India in a top hat? Why, even the Dukes had worn bowlers and one of them a cap. I sat tight, and smiled like the tiger of the Niger.

Then the blow fell. That objectionable man stooped down slowly, with a snake-like movement, and what I saw even then was a nasty gloating smile—I believe he must have read my thoughts—stooped down and drew his beautiful shining topper carefully from underneath the seat, brushing it on his sleeve in that horrid, creepy way men have. I gazed fascinated at the snake-like movement. Then it flashed upon me. If I wasn't sitting on his hat, what, then, was I sitting on? I admit I lost my presence of mind right there. I leaped up with a little cry. Underneath, very flat, very subdued-looking, lay what had once been a big cardboard box of chocolate creams that that babyish girl Marjory had brought to eat by the way. I had had a premonition on the platform that I should never get on with Marjory. Needless to say, those chocolates were uneatable, and over the state of my dress I draw a veil. And it was new on that morning. I felt horribly aggrieved with the pompous man and Marjory and everybody in general, most of all with Lady Manifold, because she sympathised. I read the *Morning Post* upside down all the way to Dover.

CHAPTER III

AN AUTHORESS, A DUCHESS, AND A POMPOUS MAN

I CAN'T say that I had altogether recovered my temper by the time we reached Dover. Certainly the elements there didn't exactly tend to soothe one. Can anything in the world be more detestable than getting one's self and one's belongings from the train to the steamer in a good steady downpour of rain? There was only one thing that cheered me up, and that was the sight of Marjory as she prepared to descend in her garden-party frock. I don't mind admitting now that of course she did look much smarter than I did at Charing Cross, but I had my revenge at Dover. Not the longest and most enveloping of ulsters could save that dress altogether. I smiled with unholy joy. There was probably worse to come. In a plaintive little voice on the way down Marjory had said she did so hope the crossing would be calm. I guessed she was just one of those sailors who are ill before they get on board.

We descended. Fortunately, I had been wise, and had taken nothing but the smallest of handbags

and a roll of rugs into the carriage with me. Ermyntrude followed close behind, heavily laden, but very cool, very determined to get there somehow. When Ermyntrude's countenance assumes that grim, determined look, I get chilled. I always think she looks as if she were holding the most frightful flow of violent language but lightly in reserve, and as if the smallest provocation would unloose it. It's a most serviceable look at times to go about with, as it kind of clears the way in front. I've seen people just glance at Ermyntrude and shelve off straight away; I've even heard them meekly apologetic when they haven't done anything at all. Ermyntrude is quite invaluable on a railway platform. Even Marjory had gumption enough to see that, and clung to her like a shadow. Lady Manifold trudged along behind with her skirts held high, practically regardless of the rain overhead or the slush underfoot. I suppose a moment like that when she is caught in the rain in company with people better dressed than herself is the only time when the shabbily-dressed woman feels a passing glow of triumph. But it isn't worth while dressing with an eye to that shower of rain. I prefer the perpetual glow with the moments of depression of the well-dressed woman.

Marjory was on the verge of tears by the time we got on the boat. It was just a bit squashy getting on. Marjory wasn't carrying anything. She had quite enough to do to take care of herself. I forged ahead with my bundle of rugs in front, and got on the boat long before she did. Marjory is

no good at the polite and gentle art of pushing. She ought to go and get practice at the autumn sales in town. She loves a bargain, so perhaps that might make her keen. But I guess her only real hope is to get a husband to push for her, though from the note I've taken of them, husbands are not much use in that line. Any woman if she tries can push past any man any day.

That Dover-Calais boat I don't just remember with a gleam of pleasure. I admit I felt downright ill before we had fairly got under weigh. I left Marjory, green and crumpled up in a deck-chair, with Lady Manifold marching up and down in front of her exhorting her to do the same. Lady Manifold is one of those objectionable people—a good sailor. I don't think there is any callousness quite equal to the callousness of the good sailor towards the bad. Lady Manifold, marching up and down, the picture of robust and perfect health, looked positively obnoxious. She even turned to me with offensive cheeriness and asked me to walk up and down too. Now the boat had not begun to roll much as yet, but I felt that to walk up and down was a physical and absolute impossibility. A strange and unholy desire for absolute seclusion seized me. A great wave of hatred and disgust of mankind in general suddenly swept over me. The impulse to get away was irresistible—anywhere out of sight of the crowd, where I could not see Lady Manifold still walking briskly up and down and balancing herself with unsteady steps as the awful rolling of the ship increased.

I groped my way towards the ladder, careless now that I was of the emerald hue known of yore to little Johnnie Jones and his sister Sue. I swung unsteadily at the top of the steps, clinging to the hand rail.

‘Let me give you a hand,’ said a familiar deep bass voice in my ears.

I half turned feeling the desire for loneliness too great even to welcome this well-intentioned interruption, yet doubting withal if without help I could attain my end. Yet when I saw who it was, I steadied myself. Now I could not suffer myself to be rescued from my straits, however bad, by the friend of Dukes and Duchesses, who had sold me so horribly in the matter of his top-hat. So by a great effort I smiled. I even thought of speaking, but I felt just in time that that would be too dangerous. Even the smile threatened to cost me dear. Just then the roll of the boat was awful, and that wave of longing for solitude engulfed me. In a moment of mortal weakness I was about to give myself over into the hands of the enemy.

Then something happened. One of the Dukes suddenly rushed past us and stumbled rather than ran down the companion way. I just caught sight of his face as it flashed by. He was the Duke who had walked the platform at Charing Cross with his head erect and his glance fixed straight in front of him. Now he still looked straight ahead, but his expression wasn’t quite the same. His chest somehow seemed to have fallen in and his back got hunched up—altogether a pitiable figure of a man.

No self-respecting man ever ought to get seasick. I don't know what I should do if I married a man who turned out to be a bad sailor. I think it would be a justifiable ground of divorce. It probably is somewhere in the States, but not being married yet I'm naturally not well up in the subject. Anyway, that Duke put me right off seasick husbands.

But I was soon to have it demonstrated that there are other drawbacks to a seasick husband besides the fact that he looks such a loon. No sooner had the seasick Duke disappeared than his Duchess, in the same case with himself, came staggering along the deck clutching for support at anything she came across in the most ungracelike way. She had almost reached the companion ladder when there was a most awful lurch that made you feel kind of churned up inside. I closed my eyes and leaned back against the boarding, murmuring feebly to the pompous man at my side, 'Oh, take me away—anywhere—oh, take me away!' I put out my hand towards the place where he stood. But no reply came, and I suddenly felt that he was no longer there. I opened my eyes. There was that perfidious monster tenderly helping the stricken Duchess past me down the ladder. I drew myself together, and followed with all the dignity I could. I remember distinctly a passionate desire to be revenged, and I pride myself upon the thought because it proves that I could not have really been so very bad at the time, as you don't even care about revenge when you are real seasick.

Alone and unaided I reached the ladies' cabin at

last. Great heavens, it was like the Black Hole ! There wasn't a place vacant anywhere, and people lay about on the floor in a limp, helpless, don't-care-for-anything-more-in-this-life sort of way that seemed to catch right on to you, and make you feel the same as soon as ever you saw it. The Duchess was clinging to the doorway, feeling, I guess, if she felt anything like I did, real bad. Suddenly, I don't know how it happened, but we found ourselves in each other's arms. We both laughed for a second in a weak hysterical sort of way, and then another lurch upset us altogether, and we fell over on the ground right on top of a prostrate form. Now, if I had not a Duchess to corroborate me, I should hesitate to say anything about the remark that came from that prostrate form, but there is really no denying the fact that the Duchess and I were sent to perdition by a muffled voice that struggled out from under the Duchess's skirts. Unfortunately that prostrate form travelled second-class on board ship, and we never met again. I felt that she might have been quite interesting. I always admire a woman who says what she thinks, and I guess it wasn't just comforting to have even a Duchess fall heavily upon you when you are feeling right-down seasick. The only thing I ever heard about the woman afterwards was that her name was O'Davitt. I suggested to the Duchess then that perhaps we were doing her an injustice and, unlikely as it might seem, she was only telling us her name when we fell upon her, and the indistinctness naturally caused by the oppression of

the Duchess's skirts caused us to misunderstand. But the Duchess was quite certain that she used the second personal pronoun and not the neuter gender, and I, of course, can't venture an opinion against a Duchess.

That Duchess and I made quite friends as we lay on the floor. I happened by good luck to have fallen near a pillar to which I had to cling to prevent myself rolling over when the floor took on too acute an angle. The Duchess had no pillar, so I said in one of my speakable moments, 'You just cling on to me,' which she did to the extent of some twelve stone. I congratulated myself that I had practised Sandow exercises hard for the last six months. We didn't talk much, but I am sure the Duchess felt grateful. She apologised several times when she had to cling extra hard. I remembering wondering if our pompous friend had made the acquaintance of any of his four Dukes and Duchesses in this casual sort of way. Perhaps even then he was attending to the Duchess's husband in the men's saloon. I suppose if you wanted to scrape up an acquaintance with anyone and took enough trouble, you could manage to manipulate circumstances so as to get an unconventional introduction. I guess some people would have just jumped at being as seasick as I was in order to scrape up an acquaintance with a Duchess. Now, I'm not lacking in the bump of veneration, but I've known a Duchess at home, and well, I don't mind confessing that I don't think that Duchess just exactly wants me to become a Duchess too. You see, Lord Hendley

happens to be the son of a Duke, so I'm in the running myself.

I felt a perfect wreck when I got off that boat at Calais. It had been one of the worst crossings they had known for years. But I had not quite lost all sense of shame, as most of the passengers had. I did do my best by smiling and rubbing my face surreptitiously to get rid of my greenish hue, and I did put my hat straight and push in a few stray hairpins with Ermyntrude's help—an Ermyntrude a little pale, but grim and determined as ever—I flattered myself that I soon looked all right again. Marjory looked like a dissipated doll that had been roughly played with, and she sat helplessly on a seat without trying to make herself look decent. I wondered if she would have bucked up if Tommy Lovelace had been around. Lady Manifold and Ermyntrude were wrestling with the baggage question, and the latter, laden with parcels, was indignantly rejecting the proposals of a French porter. Ermyntrude scorns to speak anything but English, so on the Continent she has to rely chiefly on the determined glitter in her eye.

We were in the train at last. I found I had to share a double berth compartment with a woman I had never seen before. We looked at each other furtively with that mutual distrust and suspicion with which English people always do regard one another until they have been properly introduced. Now, of course, I know that, being an American, I ought to have been friendly with that stranger

right away. But I think long residence in England must have stamped out my natural affection for the human race. An Englishman doesn't like being caught on to right away. He thinks it bad form, and that anybody who is just eager to know him must be without friends himself, and that probably there is something real fishy about him. Nobody in England wants to know anybody else unless they can get something out of them. I don't mean necessarily anything tangible or pecuniary. But they want to know them so as to get a card for their parties, to get introductions through them to people more important still, to marry off their daughters to them, or to make a present to them of their younger sons. Dorothy is just like that. She won't look at anybody unless she thinks they are what she calls worth knowing. I suppose Dorothy is a snob, but at least she shares that appellation with nine-tenths of the other women in society, and a good half of the men.

So that's how it is that I'm impregnated with British aloofness, and have lost my native primitiveness that regarded my fellow men as brothers, and not merely as so many stepping-stones to my own advancement. I was summing-up my fellow-traveller and wondering if she was what Dorothy would call worth knowing. At first sight I didn't think she was. She was rather the kind of woman that I haven't much use for. Her hat came from Paris, there was no doubt about that. But her dress bore an unmistakably English look about it, and it was put on as only an Englishwoman does

put on her clothes. I always think it such a pity that the gods didn't bestow just that one more favour on Englishwomen—the knack of putting on their clothes. It's rather a terrible defect in the race. That's why I'm always real grateful I'm an American by birth. The gods were liberal to us when they doled out this gift, and though they placed us geographically far from Paris, they planted Parisian instincts in our hearts. Of course, I admit that Americans can be real dowdy. The love of guide-books, which the gods gave us in such ample measure too, blunts all the finer instincts, if you don't keep it within due bounds. That's why English, French, and Germans get such wrong impressions of us, since those who have let themselves get under the influence of the guide-book-habit are naturally most in evidence. Now if you give yourself over, body and soul, to the love of guide-books, you get hustled in trying to see too much. And if you're hustled you don't have time to put your clothes on properly, and soon get a sort of scraggy, worried look all round.

That woman who travelled with me had certainly got hustled. She never kept still, and that's disconcerting to any dress. Her luggage fairly blocked the compartment, and even then she seemed anxious lest it might not all be there. It was she who spoke first.

'I guess,' she said, settling herself in the corner seat at last, 'I guess we're mostly Americans on board this car.'

I positively jumped with astonishment. I hadn't

even suspected her nationality. I felt at once that she was a guide-book American, and marvelled that I hadn't spotted it. I opened my handbag and took out a book as I answered her. A book was the best defence I had to keep off conversation if she bored me.

'Oh,' I said politely, 'are there so many Americans going by this train?'

'Guess you haven't seen the passenger list,' she said in a tone of hurt surprise; 'why, it's just cram full with the very best American names. A good seventy-five per cent. on board this car, I reckon, come from the States. Why, there's——'

And she proceeded to give me the names and addresses of all the Americans on the train. Some of the people everybody had heard of, most of them, however, were unknown to fame this side. I murmured polite interest, and opened my book. I hadn't any use for a woman like this. But she was not to be shaken off so easily. She leaned forward and looked at the title of my book.

'What!' she exclaimed, 'are you reading "Number 2001, 25th Street"?''

'Yes,' I said coldly.

She was leaning forward, curiously eager.

'How do you like it?' she asked.

I felt downright annoyed at being interfered with like this. I made myself comfortable in my corner of the carriage, and deliberately opened the book at the place where I had left off reading it the day before.

'I think it's one of the most fascinating books

I've ever read and I'm just longing to see how it ends,' I said, fixing her with a glassy stare, and then beginning to read straight away.

I don't know if I exactly expected her to speak again after that. Anyway, I felt somehow surprised at her silence, and was weak enough to glance up.

A momentary flash of hesitation and embarrassment was struggling with gratified pleasure on her face. It was the only look of the kind I ever saw there. I wondered.

'I value that speech of yours just cent per cent,' she said smiling. 'A compliment like that is downright fascinating when it comes out just unconscious and spontaneous.'

I looked at her in amazement. What on earth could she mean? I suppose I looked a bit at sea. My fellow-traveller smiled her smile of horrible complacency.

'I wrote that book,' she said.

I suddenly felt that somehow that book had lost all interest for me straight away.

'What!' I cried, sitting up in my surprise, 'you are Argustus Strong?'

She smiled again, satisfaction radiating all around her.

'I guess that's me,' she said.

I sank back into my corner again. If only she had shown a little more of the saving grace of modesty, whether she had it or not, I should have been quite pleased at meeting her. I always like meeting people who have made a name for themselves in any walk of life. It's stimulating. But I

do like them to be modest and retiring as most of them are. It is so interesting trying to draw them out, whereas nobody cares to hear anything that someone else is dying to tell them. It's only the things that there's a chance of your not getting to know that you are really keen on hearing. But still, whatever there might be against 'Argustus Strong,' it was impossible to ignore the woman who had written a book like 'Number 2001, 25th Street,' that had run into seventy-four editions.

'Yes,' she was saying with a purr of self-congratulation, 'they are just bringing out the seventy-fifth edition. That will make the total number up to seven hundred thousand copies. But I'm just going to bustle round until it tops the million. I guess that'll be a record that no one on earth can sneeze at.'

I looked at her sadly. Could this really be the woman who had written that charming, touching tale of the poorest quarter of the great American city, which had found its way to the hearts not only of her fellow-countrymen, but of all the English-speaking world—the very book that I was now so deeply interested in, and should have doubtless enjoyed until the end if I hadn't been unfortunate enough to meet its authoress? I looked at her. She still wore that complacent smile, and I felt that she was going to boast some more about the popularity of the book. I understood now why it was that I had felt at the very first that she lacked something. It was the saving grace of modesty. That woman positively shone with pride in her

work. Ordinary legitimate pride I should not have minded, but to go and boast of a beautiful, inspired book like that was to take away half its charm.

‘How very interesting,’ I murmured.

‘That book took me just six months to write,’ she was saying, as if I were an interviewer and had asked for all these facts. ‘The first two months I only just dotted down things. I was living right away back in the slums as one of them. I guess you wouldn’t have recognised me from one of those flower-women on the London pavements. I just did things wholesale. Then I went straight home and wrote hard. I revised it three times, and got writer’s cramp twice, and thought I should have had to give over. But no, I kept on. I couldn’t be bothered with a typewriter, though I’ve just been offered five hundred pounds—five hundred pounds,’ she repeated impressively ‘to say that I typed it with a Brinton typewriter. I own up I hesitated a bit. Five hundred pounds is five hundred pounds, and I could easily have typed the thing through afterwards so as to have had the type copy by me if anybody came along to nose around to see it.’

I gasped at her effrontery. The book was ruined for me utterly and for ever. I had no desire to finish it now, and closed it sadly and put it on the seat beside me. For an hour its authoress rattled on about it, until, fortunately, it was time for dinner, and I got a respite. Needless to say, I escaped her in the dining-car, where she was joined by a common-looking little man whom she called ‘Phil.’

Back in our wretched little compartment the question arose as to which of us should have the lower berth. I was quite ready to take either, but 'Argustus Strong' insisted on tossing.

'I guess I'll win,' she said as she spun the coin; 'I'm on the crest of the wave just now with a seventy-fifth edition.'

I could have throttled her as the coin came down for her declaration. She promptly took the lower berth, and I climbed up above, furious with the world in general. The authoress still bustled about among her packages, and finally pounced upon my copy of her book, which I had left below.

'I guess you'd like me to write my name in this,' she said, picking it up and opening it. It wasn't a question, it was a statement of fact. I forced myself to mutter some conventional word of thanks.

She produced a stylographic pen and wrote.

'There,' she said, as she handed the book up to me, 'I guess that'll make your friends just green with envy.'

Again I murmured something, and read what she had written.

'The authoress is glad to find that Nicola Fairfax is one of the millions who appreciate her book, and guesses that she and the authoress will be lifelong friends.'

An hour later, as I heard the authoress snoring violently below, I leaned down quietly and dropped that book out on to the line. It was only then that I felt it possible to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

SOME ODDITIES AND OTHERS ON BOARD

WHY do the passengers who get on board at Marseilles always look down on the passengers who have come round by sea, and those who have come round by sea offer such a frigid reception to those who get on board at Marseilles? I've much more sympathy with the latter, though I was one of the former myself. That boat must have been just about as comfortable and airy and roomy as you could want before we got on. After that it was just about as crowded and tiresome as it could be. The deck was blocked right up with chairs, and unless you got up early and secured a good place you had to sit all day where there wasn't a ghost of a breeze, and you couldn't go on deck early in the morning, because it was crowded with men in pyjamas and towels, and only much-married women dared face them. That was why I made friends with Major Street. He was so useful in getting my chair into good position before I came on deck, and, of course, I couldn't help it if he always did put his chair next to mine.

Major Street was quite a nice man. He had been in South Africa, played polo in the winning regimental team at Hurlingham or Ranelagh, and also won the Kadir Cup. I don't know what that last is. I must remember to ask someone whom I don't mind knowing how ignorant I am. The Kadir Cup must be something very wonderful, as no less than three men have told me in awed whispers of Major Street's winning it. I do love to hear nice fresh boys talking in awed and admiring whispers of some great deed done by some man whom they look upon as a minor deity in consequence. There were four young subs just straight from Sandhurst on board. We became great friends. Their freshness was wonderful, like their moustaches. One of them had won a sword at Sandhurst, and of course he was the most modest of them all.

They didn't talk much to the other ladies on board, and so people naturally said spiteful things about them, and I don't think I was just exactly popular among the women-folk on board that ship. If I had only been five years younger, and had not had quite such varied experiences, I should have fallen in love with that Sword Boy from Sandhurst right away. He was so gloriously young and loyal and enthusiastic and keen on life. It kind of freshened you up to talk to him. Of course, he hadn't what people call an idea in his head, and he admitted that he didn't know how he passed his exams. Yet if he doesn't get on in the army, and rise to the top of the tree, then all

I can say is that the British Army isn't run on sound lines. He's just the kind of material you want in war-time—plenty of muscle, plenty of pluck, and a good level head. I would sooner have trusted my safety to him than to any other man on board, and we had two doddering old Generals, hardly able to support the weight of their medals, and half a dozen Colonels, smart and otherwise, with quite a multiplicity of Majors and Captains. Out of them all I would have chosen that Sword Boy from Sandhurst if I had had to go to the Front. He was just the kind of man to inspire you right away with confidence, and unless I'm no good at judging character, he'll go far. Now if the regulations go and pass him over for some bookworm who has mugged up 'How to Scout' or 'Hints on Signalling,' and who hasn't got the backbone to inspire confidence in his men, there's something rotten somewhere in the British Army. I hope they will make my step-father Secretary of State for Army affairs, and then my mother, who has got a good level head, will have something to say to the way that things are run.

I really do think there must be something wrong in the army system, else why are there so many men like Major Duddleton, Captain Focher, and Colonel Trayner, who were prominent figures on deck every day. I suppose they really were nice fresh young subalterns once. Now, I wouldn't trust them to read the Riot Act, whatever that may be. As for the Generals who are supposed to lead them, heaven help the Tommies in the rear!

One was a perfect old woman, and I'm sure coddled himself no end. He was worse than Aunt Agatha. The other was a bit better, but he was a nasty old man, and I'm glad he came to a sad end. I don't quite mean what you think I mean by that, but you will see later on. It was he who was one of the special admirers of the lady whom we all called 'Fluffy.'

There was only one thing that annoyed me about that Sword-Boy, and I'm not sure that secretly I didn't like him all the better for it sometimes, and that was his admiration for this same lady. Now Mrs. Simpkin-Briston, known irreverently as 'Fluffy,' next to the American authoress, was my pet aversion on board that boat. As luck would have it, she formed the fourth in our cabin, so that I was bound to know much more of her than I ever wanted to know. She was far and away the most dressy woman on board—needless to say, most unsuitably dressy. Her get up was worthy of the Gaiety, and the worst of it was that it had seen its best days. Now nothing is so hopeless and tawdry as finery soiled. It wears such a horribly dissipated sort of look, and it's no use your trying to look nice and sweet and good in it. And then her hair was so dreadfully fluffy. Of course, all the ladies fought shy of her, but some of the men seemed to find her interesting to talk to. But her greatest friend was the less doddery of the two doddery old generals. He seemed to have succumbed to her fascinations somewhere *en route* to Marseilles, and they sat at the same table on board, much to the disgust of the friends who were with him, and had

arranged this table beforehand. It seems that there had been one seat vacant, and the General had gaily brought along Fluffy. The other ladies were frightfully indignant when they saw the soiled finery, and it was from them that the questions first began to pass around the ship, 'Who is Mrs. Simpkin-Briston?' and 'Where, and who is, or who was Mr. Simpkin-Briston?' Neither of these questions found an answer, and the lady herself, it seems, had not thrown any light upon the matter, though the ladies who had had to talk to her had done their best. Now, she had taken up my Sword Boy from Sandhurst very warmly from the start, and he was her devoted champion. I questioned him as we neared Port Said.

'Do you know who Mrs. Simpkin-Briston is?' I asked.

'Who she is?' he repeated. It only just seemed to have struck him that this was rather a natural question to ask. Then he frowned. 'She's a very charming woman,' was all he said.

I felt crushed, positively crushed, by this boy from Sandhurst, with his loyalty and trust. I was half annoyed, half proud of him.

'And who is Mr. Simpkin-Briston?' I was rash enough to pursue the subject, half to see what he would say.

'She hasn't told me,' was all he said, 'and, of course, I haven't asked.' But the look he turned towards me made me forbear to ask him anything further about the Simpkin-Bristons, and I am not one to be easily put off.

I just fairly longed to hug that boy. How I should love to hear him defending me like that. If only some nasty, jealous woman would begin asking him insinuating questions about me. For I know that he would have done the same for me, or for anyone else whom he called a friend.

‘Boy,’ I said—I always called him Boy when we were alone, I think because every time I said the word he turned and gave me such a beautiful smile. ‘Boy, always stick to your friends like that, but—but don’t make the mistake of thinking them altogether perfect.’

‘One must always do that of a real friend,’ he said. He was looking out to sea with his elbow resting on his knee and his chin on his hand, in his favourite attitude—the attitude that I shall always remember him in. Poor Boy! he little realised all that life held in store for him. He had learned so much, and yet perhaps they were the hardest lessons of life that still remained unlearned. Why is it that it is oftenest the noblest of men who are just like clay in the hands of a woman?’

I often used to think of what Carlyle wrote when I looked at Boy and wished that it could be done. I should just love to send my Sword-Boy from Sandhurst straight out to govern a dependency. I told him once of what Carlyle had written. He hadn’t heard of it, of course, dear Boy. I doubt if he could have told me with any great accuracy anything at all about the great sage and his writings. But what did that matter? Carlyle himself would have been the first to admit that that was no bar

to his making a capable ruler. Boy was awfully taken with the words, though he was much too modest to think that he would have been the one chosen.

‘By Jove,’ was all he said, ‘if only one had the chance.’

It was just after leaving Port Said that Boy came to me with that serious look on his bright young face that always made me half inclined to smile. It seemed to suit it at once so well and yet so ill.

‘What is it, Boy?’ I asked as he sat down beside me, and I guessed that he found it hard to begin what he had to say. He turned and smiled at me in his own delightful way.

‘Oh, it’s only a favour I wanted to ask you,’ he said, and then he stopped. It seemed that it was evidently a difficult favour to ask, and yet I should have thought that he had got to know me well enough in the last week to guess that I would have done much at his request.

‘What is it?’ I asked again, and then he blurted it all out in his own boyish way.

‘It’s Mrs. Simpkin-Briston,’ he said, dropping unconsciously into his favourite attitude, not looking at me but gazing out to sea as if he found it easier to speak that way. ‘None of the ladies will have anything to say to her on board, and I’m sure she feels it. I want you to go and talk to her sometimes, will you?’

He turned round and looked me full in the face then. Poor Boy! he little knew to what a test he was putting a woman’s friendship. A woman will

do much, but to make advances to another woman she has once condemned and cut is a hard task that few women are equal to. But I hid what I thought from Boy, though I couldn't meet those honest eyes of his, and I too looked out to sea—to be able to do which is so great a compensation for so many of the trials that life on board ship brings.

'You will do it, won't you?' he said eagerly. 'She's an awfully good sort really, but these people here misunderstand her and don't appreciate her. You see, half of them are officials, who of course keep to themselves and look down on the non-officials, while the other half are Delhi-Durbarites out from home, who don't have much to say to anyone outside their own circle either.'

'And did she know no one when she came on board?' I asked.

'Not a soul, she told me so herself.' Poor Boy! the thought of doubting her word never so much as entered his head.

The end of it was, of course, that I promised, and was straightway perfectly miserable for the next two days. Boy tactfully didn't mention the subject again, but I knew he was wondering when I was going to fulfil my promise. Time after time I wandered round the deck in a restless sort of way, trying to make up my mind to go and speak to her. But always something happened to prevent it. That evil old General was sitting with her mostly, or else her chair was packed in so closely among a crowd of other chairs that it was impossible to get near her. I had hoped to begin by being more

pleasant to her in the cabin, but even there I hadn't the chance. She always came to bed at the latest possible moment, long after we were in our berths, and she used to get up frantically early in the morning, doubtless in order that we might see as little as possible of her in her unfinished state and of the process of making herself presentable. I know this, as once she overslept herself with fatal results. Lady Manifold, Marjory, and I all confessed afterwards that we should never have recognised her as Fluffy until she had nearly finished.

For three days, with my pride and my aversion buried deep in my pocket, I just pursued Mrs. Simpkin-Briston. On the third day I ran her to earth. I found her sitting alone, and a vacant chair within reach. Regardless of whose it might be I drew it towards her, and plunged into conversation as naturally as I could. Mrs. Simpkin-Briston exhibited a polite surprise and was courteously unresponsive. I even began to feel that she was snubbing me. I had to make desperate efforts to keep the conversation up, or it would have flagged hopelessly. I was growing furiously angry under what I trust was a smiling exterior, and I had to think hard of Boy's earnest face to prevent myself getting up indignantly and flouncing—yes, flouncing—away. It was infuriating. People passing and repassing up and down the deck looked at me as I sat talking to Fluffy with undisguised surprise. I even saw people whispering to one another in that ill-bred manner board ship life seems to generate. Why is it that some usually quite well-

behaved and harmless people suddenly become right-down rude and offensive on board ship? Both men and women are the same. Things they would never dream of doing elsewhere, they do with the greatest nonchalance on a P. and O. steamer. I haven't found Englishwomen rude as a rule except at drawing-rooms and auction sales, but when they get on board ship they seem to fling off their veneer of civilisation and return to something very like barbarism. Rudeness somehow seems in the air itself. I talked all this over with Major Street, and he had some amusing explanations to account for the metamorphosis. His idea was that it was partly the result of evil temper generated by board-ship cooking, partly the result of being caged up with a lot of people you have never seen before and never wish to see again, and partly from a general revulsion of feeling against one's fellow men by seeing too much of them and all their little foibles that board-ship life shows up. But, whatever may be the cause, there it is, and there is no denying it—people lose whatever they had in the way of manners as soon as they get on board. No less than seven people I determined never to speak to again as I sat with Mrs. Simpkin-Briston. They either looked at me with rude, unblushing surprise or spoke to one another with a laugh and a glance in our direction that was unmistakable. Mrs. Simpkin-Briston took no notice. Poor thing! I expect she was used to attracting adverse attention. I was not and I resented it.

There had fallen a pause in our conversation

while I was trying to swallow my anger. Suddenly Mrs. Simpkin-Briston leaned forward, and looked up into my face with a horrible satirical smile.

‘What is it you want?’ she said contemptuously.

I gazed at her in amazement. Her face grew hard, like the face of a woman fighting for her life, and I shuddered as I lay back in my chair without replying to her impossible question. What was there to say to such a woman as this? Her next words would have brought me to my feet in a fury had I not felt that half a dozen curious eyes were fixed upon us. The knowledge of that fact alone controlled me.

‘I suppose you are in love with the Boy,’ she said, and laughed softly. It was an evil, mocking little laugh, that made me want to throttle her.

What I should have said I don’t know if I had not just then caught sight of Boy at the other end of the deck. He was coming towards us, though he had not seen us yet.

‘It’s no use,’ the woman laughed in the same mocking voice. She, too, had seen Boy coming, and so hurried over the next words, perhaps saying more than she had meant to say. ‘Do your worst. He will marry me at Bombay, if—if somebody else doesn’t.’

I was just about staggered at her audacity for the moment, and before I had time to speak Boy joined us. His grateful smile at me as he sat down made me want to laugh and cry at once. Yet for his sake I sat on there for a few minutes longer, and even laughed and spoke to the woman again for his

sake. Boy was in great spirits, and I knew they were partly due to what I had done. Poor Boy! I sat on as long as I could—quite long enough to see the fascination this woman held for him, and then I slipped away. It was foolish of me, but I went straight down to my cabin and had a good cry. I remember, even as I cried, trying to think when I had cried last. I think it was over a broken doll, and that must have been years and years ago. Crying is such a mistake. It can't possibly do any good, and it's especially foolish on board ship, as you have to stay shut up in your nasty cabin for at least two hours until you look human again. I'm no believer in tears, and though I must cry once more before finishing this book, I do hope no one will put me down as a tearful person. I should hate to be thought that.

As I lay waiting for the traces of the tears to dry away, I made up my mind what to do. As soon as the glass assured me that I didn't look red and nipped about the nose any longer, I went on deck. On the rare occasions when I do cry I do the thing wholesale, and my nose always looks like an overripe cherry for at least two hours after. I can't imagine how that friend of Charles II.—a Duchess of some kind or other I believe she was, too—used to look more beautiful when she cried than when she laughed. I don't think she could ever have cried real hard as I had just done. Anyway, I was still feeling a bit heavy, and was so glad I had put on my big pink chiffon hat, which always takes attention off my face, as I had to go twice round the deck

before I could find Major Street. I felt I wanted a man's help. Men really are useful sometimes when you want somebody knocked down or given a real good talking to. I remember thinking how useful Lord Hendley would have been. He always looks quite capable of knocking anybody down, and that does give a woman such a safe, confiding, comfortable sort of feeling. As it was, however, I had to confide in Major Street, so I told him all about the Boy, whom I knew he had taken a great fancy to, and all about Fluffy and the wicked General. He listened quite quietly; that's what I always like about a man. He'll hear you out to the end however roundabout you are, and he won't keep interrupting you with idiotic questions as a woman would.

'Now,' I said to him when I had finished, 'you've just got to save that Boy without too rude a shock to his feelings.'

Major Street didn't seem to think that the feelings of the 'young fool' mattered. But I felt hopeful, because when an older man calls a younger one a 'young fool' in that tone of voice it means he's going to do his best for him.

Two days later the Major came and flung himself down in a chair beside me. 'The young fool!' he muttered between his teeth — 'the confounded young fool!'

I waited. When a man speaks in that low, determined sort of voice a woman thinks herself lucky if he doesn't swear outright. So I waited till the danger was past.

‘It’s no use,’ he said presently. ‘There’s nothing for it but to let him go his own way and buy his own experience. And, by Jove! he’ll buy it dear.’

‘He must not be allowed to do that,’ I said decidedly. ‘I told you—I look to you to save him.’

‘My dear Miss Fairfax,’ he said mildly, ‘believe me, I did my best in the most tactful way I could. But you know what young Tenison is—loyal to the core to anyone he counts a friend.’

I did know, but I wasn’t going to admit that I saw it as a reason to excuse his failure.

‘Surely,’ I said rather stiffly, ‘surely you put the case before him in such a light that he couldn’t fail to see it.’

‘Nothing on earth could move him, I believe,’ he returned disgustedly. ‘What do you think the young idiot said to me? “Have you ever been in love?” he asked quietly, when I had put things pretty plainly to him. Well, being a married man with three children, what could I answer him? “And would you listen to anything that anybody told you against the woman you loved?” he went on. Being a married man, again, what could I answer? “And unless you respected the man very much who told you these things,” he said finally, with that frank, honest look of his, “wouldn’t you feel justified in knocking him down?” Well, after that, what could I do but clear out?’

‘You ought not to have allowed him to ask you such questions,’ I said severely; ‘it was fatally weak.’

‘Yes,’ said Major Street quite humbly. How I do

hate a man when he's humble ! Let him be modest if you like, but not humble. ' Yes, I admit I've failed. But there is this, Miss Fairfax : I did my best, and I don't believe anybody on earth would have succeeded better.'

I knew he was right, but I wished he was wrong, so I'm afraid I was rather hard on Major Street. One generally is hard on people who tell one unpleasant things that one knows to be true and wishes were not.

So the days passed in blissful happiness for Boy, and we grew gradually near Bombay. I have been so occupied in setting down all this about Boy that I find I haven't said anything at all about most of the other passengers. Some of them really were worth writing about—as freaks. You could scarcely have picked up a more motley and incongruous crew if you had searched all through the English-speaking world. At the head of society on the *Arethusa* of course were the four Dukes and Duchesses. Duke number one was big and portly and jovial. He talked to everybody. He might have been running for Parliament, and we his constituents. He even went over into the second-class, and report says that he even kissed a baby, though I believe that was only board-ship gossip. Duke number two was the very reverse—cold, self-contained, impenetrable, with rather dreamy eyes and hair like a poet's—if poets really do wear long hair—and a manner calculated to freeze at fifty yards. He used to sit mostly alone, and you would have thought that nobody cared to speak to him if you hadn't

known that he was a Duke. Duke number three was the little man who looked straight ahead, and whom the churning of the sea had caused to desert his Duchess on the Dover-Calais boat. He was a perfectly harmless little man, quite affable, but he hadn't much of a mind above foreign postage-stamps, which he always brought into the conversation somewhat in the manner of Mr. Dick and poor King Charles's head. Duke and Duchess number four might really just as well have not been Duke and Duchess at all for all the use they made of it. They always sat about in quiet corners, and looked poor and ill-fed, and whenever they were pointed out to people, people always cried 'What !' in a tone of shocked surprise. It must be dreadfully trying to be 'your Graces' when you look so much more like Mr. and Mrs. Brown of Notting Hill. It must be very nice to be able to give your names as the Duke and Duchess, and to hear them rolled out on the tongue of the footman with the beautiful calves as he throws back the folding-doors and announces you, and to hear the pause of expectation in the conversation, but what about getting inside when you know that nobody would ever have believed it if the footman hadn't said so ?

The Duchess who belonged to Duke number one was about the most perfectly fascinating woman I have ever seen. She was tall and divinely fair, and sweet and gracious, and you fell in love with her at first sight. You only had to see her, and you couldn't possibly be a Radical or a Socialist for quite a long time after. The daughter of one Duke and

the granddaughter of two, she was just born to be a Duchess straight away. Duchess number two was quite the reverse of Duke number two. She was very much Vere de Vere to look at, very handsome, very imposing, but untidy withal, and though I don't like to say it of a Duchess, she didn't always look quite clean. I remember once asking another girl what must be the first thing necessary in the man she would marry, and she had said, 'Oh, that he should be clean.' I had laughed at the time, but when I saw that Duchess I understood. The man I marry too must be clean. Fortunately, a nice fresh cleanliness is the well-bred Englishman's chief characteristic. Duchess number three was my Duchess—that is to say, the Duchess I met on the floor in the ladies' cabin on the Dover-Calais boat. We became great friends. She was a dear, and we shall meet again when we get to Delhi. She isn't one of those people who, when they've got one foot on the ladder, use the other foot to keep everybody else from getting a foot on that ladder too. Instead, she holds out a hand, and says cheerfully : ' Here, come along, I've got one foot on this ladder, and if you buck up I'll try and make room for you too.' Now that's the sort of person I like. But they are rare.

There were lots of other people, oddities and absurdities, on board. There was the travelling M.P., of course, with philanthropic ideas and doubts as to the advisability of the Durbar. There was Lady Truefit and her daughter going out as guests of the Viceroy—they were very select in conse-

quence, and only spoke to Dukes and Duchesses. The mother was called 'the Dead Codfish,' because she looked like one, and the daughter was christened 'the Duck'—not because people liked her, but because she had a duck-like beak. I never can understand why English people use the word 'duck' as a term of endearment. I shouldn't think it any compliment to be called a duck myself. A duck waddles, and looks a fool, and quacks—no, please don't call me a duck. Then there was Lady Maria Sandington going out as some big official's guest. She was very clever, but, like so many clever people, she was rather a fool. I mean, for instance, that she allowed my pompous friend of the Durbar train to make up to her, and seemed quite to like it. I believe she was pleased at his open admiration of her title and position, which shows she must have been a fool. Horrid, pompous little man! I found out who he was one day. It was while I was talking to one of a band of four young civilians just going out to take up their posts for the first time. We were sitting together when the pompous man passed by.

'You know who that is, don't you?' said the 'griffin.' I'm told the word 'griffin' has died out, but it ought to be revived. It means what you call a 'fresher' at Oxford—anyone young and green and fertile that you can play tricks upon. 'You know who that is, don't you?' It was not a question at all as he put it, but merely a statement of fact. His voice was almost a whisper in its awe and reverence. I at once felt flippant.

‘Who—that?’ I asked contemptuously, glancing at the broad retreating back of my enemy. ‘No; who is he?’

‘Oh,’ he said, shocked and grieved, ‘I thought everybody knew who he was. He’s a member of the Board of Revenue of——’ I quite forget which province he said.

‘Indeed,’ I said, simulating deep interest, ‘and what, pray, is a Board of Revenue?’

To my intense joy I floored that young civilian straight away. He could only tell me that a Board of Revenue was a Board of Revenue, and that a member of it was a great, a very great man.

‘Shall you ever become a member of a Board of Revenue?’ I asked.

He blushed to the roots of his hair.

‘Oh, it will be a long time yet,’ he said; and I almost added, ‘I should hope it would.’ Instead I merely remarked: ‘I’m sorry for his wife.’

He was inexpressibly shocked.

‘She’s devoted to him,’ he said reprovingly.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I should think she must be devoted to him after living with him for twenty years. If she wasn’t, she must have committed suicide long ago.’

That young civilian looked at me sadly, and didn’t talk to me much again. I think he thought I was a hopeless Radical and a scoffer at sacred things. So he spent his time in making up to the member of the Board of Revenue, doubtless in anticipation of making him a worthy successor in the days to come.

The other three civilians possessed a much more

normal bump of veneration, but they were all rather raw. Why is it that men who are quite leaders and bloods in their way at Oxford are so much at sea when they come out to start life in the world at large? A boy from Sandhurst three or four years younger is fifty times more *au fait* with life. I think it is partly that the Universities are too motherly. They call themselves 'Alma Mater,' I'm told, and undoubtedly they coddle up their sons too much. I know there are an awful lot of restrictions so long as you are *in statu pupillari*. I got that phrase from Bob, who is just going up to Cambridge, so I don't vouch for its correctness, but anyway, it looks very well. I believe the poor boys have to pay twopence to get into college after nine o'clock at night and a shilling after eleven, while no one has ever dared to stay out after twelve o'clock, the penalties are said to be so awful. Now that would paralyse me all day if I thought I had to be in by nine o'clock at night or else pay twopence. I'm not mean, but I should resent that twopence. It would right down annoy me. As for getting leave to run up to town or anything like that, you have to resort to subterfuge, which is very bad for the character, and kill off every grandmother and aunt you've got, and then invent more—of the latter, of course, I mean—to the number of which a merciful Providence has set no limit.

Still, all this doesn't quite explain why a subaltern of twenty has a bigger outlook on life than a Varsity man of twenty-four. Of course, as a rule, the latter has much more in the way of brains, everyone will

admit that. But I'm not just willing to admit that too much brain is an unmixed blessing, especially when it only runs to books. If it's a question of books against action, give me the latter. The ideal is to find the two together, and that's rare. Certainly not one of those subs. on board had it, and not even one of the four civilians, though of course they may develop the action part later. For the present one of them had a weak chest, and looked as if he ought to be going to the Canary Islands for his health instead of going to swelter on the Indian plains and fight a battle to the death with plague, pestilence, and famine. Another was a student pure and simple. He should have been a Don in his Alma Mater, and never come out into the storm and stress of life. The third was the man who admired the member of the Board of Revenue. If only we had adopted conscription as a nation, there might have been some hope for him. I used to long to tell him to hold himself up, and not hang together like a scarecrow on a prop. As I said before, a woman does like a man who looks capable of knocking another man down for her should the need arise. The need probably never will arise; still, it's a comfortable feeling just to have about you. Now civilian number four was a man, but he wasn't a gentleman. It was a pity, because I've a great weakness for the latter, and so, I guess, has India. No part of the British dominions needs gentlemen to rule it so much as India. I mean gentlemen in the good old-fashioned sense. I realised that most later on when I saw the pride

and glory of all India pass before the Viceroy. None but the pick of Englishmen should be sent to rule these princes of high descent and great traditions, beside which our own traditions and descent pale into insignificance. These men are quick to recognise the differences of class among Englishmen, and one cannot but sympathise with them if they resent it when one whom they consider an inferior is sent to rule over them. Send out not bookworms, not soulless pedants, but men and gentlemen to govern India.

I've run off the lines, a bit right here. That last page ought to have figured in one of my step-father's political speeches. He might have rolled it out with great effect somewhere among the platitudes that his secretary had written out beforehand. But this is a manifest digression, and I'm still on board the *Arethusa*.

I had almost forgotten shy Mr. Colson. He was not going to the Durbar like everybody else, but to shoot lions in Somaliland. He looked quite the least capable person on board of shooting a lion, but of course that was a detail. Things are not always what they seem, or people either, and I believe he already had a lioness to his credit. However, he was rather nice and very modest. He was interesting, because he didn't tell you all about himself in the first five minutes. You felt there was a lot more to be discovered about him after the first time you met him, and a woman, being by nature curious, is attracted by that in a man. And he could keep a secret too, which is a

rare virtue in anyone. For I had a most embarrassing adventure in the Red Sea.

Now I thought at the outset how delightful it would be if one could write a book for women only. One could say so much more what one really meant, and confide all one's little weaknesses and sentimentalities that one couldn't possibly expose before the rude and unsympathetic gaze of man. But I am afraid that book for women only is an impossible dream. You see, if it were written, you never could trust men not to read it. Even if it were forbidden to sell it to any but women, curious man would manage to get it somehow. The servant-maid in every suburban villa would be stealthily bribed to steal out surreptitiously and buy it at the bookstall round the corner. In fact, the circulation of that book for women only would be huge among the men. I'm not quite so sure the women would be very keen about it.

Now I am telling this adventure that happened to me in the Red Sea as a warning to travellers of my own sex when voyaging in tropical seas. Mere men may skip the next few pages, as they can't possibly be of any interest to them. It was the second night in the Red Sea, and the heat was appalling. About half a dozen ladies had slept on deck the night before, and as a lot of us determined to follow suit on the second night, one side of the deck was reserved for us. It would certainly be much better than sweltering in one's cabin. If there was a breeze to be got one would get it, and I grew quite enthusiastic thinking how wonderfully fascinating it would be

lying out in the open gazing at the stars and the sea. Now, on which side of the deck we ladies slept, even after all that happened, I can't remember. In fact, I never can remember which is the port and which the starboard side. And it was this that led to my undoing.

'Yours is the second bed from the cabin-door on the starboard side, miss,' my nice polite young steward said, as I met him on my way up the companion stairs. 'The second from the cabin-door on the starboard side,' I repeated to myself as I hesitated at the top of the stairs. Outside all the lights were out, and no one was about. I couldn't in the least remember which was the starboard side. I cannot understand why sailors will make life more complicated by the use of outlandish nautical terms. Why on earth can't they talk simply and straightforwardly about the right and left of the boat? Most people do remember their right hand from their left, though Aunt Agatha always gets muddled if you ask her suddenly.

I knew it was no use trying to remember which was the starboard side, so I cautiously peeped out of the nearest door. It was very dark, but by peering round I was just able to make out the second bed. To my joy it was empty. Of course, I hadn't any further doubt. That must be mine. So I quietly slipped round the first sleeping form and got into it. I had just made myself comfortable, and was preparing to enjoy the stars and the sea for a while before I went to sleep, when, to my horror, from close above me came a deep gruff voice.

‘My bed, I think.’

I turned, and there was a figure, evidently a man’s, clad in a bath-towel dressing-gown, standing beside me. Imagine my horror!

‘My bed, I think,’ he repeated.

‘Oh no,’ I said timidly but confidently. ‘I’m sure it’s mine. The second from the cabin door.’

‘Well, it’s my rug, anyway,’ was the laconic reply.

I looked down, and there, neatly folded beside the bed, was a rug that certainly wasn’t mine. I suddenly realised what had happened: this must be the port side. With a muffled apology and my head ducked down I scrambled out and fled. Fortunately, I congratulated myself, it was much too dark to be recognised, and no one, I thought, had even seen me except the owner of bed number two on the port side. I hadn’t identified him by his voice, which didn’t seem at all familiar, and I could only trust that he hadn’t recognised me. I thought he was probably one of the crowd of uninteresting men on board whom I had never spoken to. I consoled myself with these thoughts as I got into my own bed number two on the starboard side.

Of course, next morning the story was all over the ship. Anything is welcome to relieve the monotony of life on board, and this, with a few exaggerations that soon got tacked on, made quite a good story. But no one knew who the lady was who had trespassed on the port side. Speculation was rife. I sat and trembled, but expressed the greatest interest and curiosity, like everybody else.

But when two days had passed, and nobody knew, I smiled again, and felt quite safe.

It was on the third day that I was sitting talking to the man who was going to hunt lions in Somaliland. I had succeeded in getting him to talk in quite an interesting way about his travels, but I thought that he seemed more shy even than usual. At last the dressing gong went, and I rose to go to my cabin. He rose too, and confronted me in an agitated, desperate sort of way. He thrust his hand in his coat-pocket, and then seemed to hesitate about pulling it out again. It was obvious that he had something to say, so I looked at him and waited. With a violent blush he pulled his hand out of his pocket.

‘I think this is yours,’ he stammered, holding out a crumpled ball that was—yes, that was my pocket-handkerchief with my name blazing in the corner of it. Suddenly it flashed upon me: I always put my handkerchief under the pillow at night. I must have put this wretched handkerchief under the pillow of bed number two on the port side, and forgotten it in my flight.

‘Oh, thank you,’ I said, as I took it, thanking him especially with a look of gratitude for not having given me away. ‘Oh, thank you so much.’

Then I hurried away, vowing that nothing on earth would ever induce me to have any of my clothes marked with my full name again. I would never commit myself to more than one initial in future. That could always be disowned if need arose. I felt real grateful to that lion-hunter man.

I admired him immensely for not having given me away. Only a man could have kept a secret like that when everybody was wanting to know it. A woman would have told it to everyone she met all in the strictest confidence, you know—not out of malice a bit, but simply out of sheer impossibility to keep a secret. The momentary importance gained by imparting eagerly desired news is so very pleasant. Don't think I'm too hard on my own sex. I don't say anything against them in general that I wouldn't say against myself in particular. I admit I find it hard to keep a secret, and just hoard up news that nobody else knows and everybody wants to know. And don't think I'm praising up the opposite sex. It isn't strength of mind that enables a man to keep a secret. It's simply the fact that the desire to tell isn't a part of his nature. Anyway, I advise everybody not on any account to have their clothes marked with their names in full.

We drew near Bombay at last. I was heartily sick of the journey. I was just about getting to feel that I had a right-down horrible nature. A great loathing for my fellow-creatures, of which I had never suspected myself capable, had sprung up within me. To have seen the 'Pompous Man' prance up and down the deck before you a hundred times a day for a whole fortnight; to have shared a cabin with Mrs. Simpkin-Briston—not to speak of Lady Manifold and Marjory, who in all conscience were trying enough; to have had to put oneself to horrible inconveniences to escape the authoress and other atrocious bores; to have seen Boy falling

day by day more and more into the clutches of Fluffy ; and to have quarrelled, most unreasonably, I admit, with Major Street because he couldn't stop it—all these things combined were enough to make the most cheerful person pessimistic, and to bring one to the conclusion that it was better that the human race should speedily die out. That was exactly what I felt those last few days in the Indian Ocean. Everybody's little peculiarities and idiosyncrasies that one had smiled upon indulgently at the start grew quite unpardonably blatant and absurd when one had seen them daily many days. And, of course, the most amazing people were always the most prominent. That's the way of life. The 'Pompous Man' paraded the deck much more than anybody else. You saw the untidy Duchess much more often than the other three, while the authoress seemed to be everywhere at once. She had a nasty habit of parading the deck at all hours of the day, doubtless taking exercise and making copy out of us at the same time in the two-things-at-a-time sort of way that would appeal to her bustling nature. If people who paraded the deck unseasonably only knew how the other people they passed and repassed loathed them ; if the men only knew what absurd figures they had, and how badly their coats fitted them, and how baggy their trousers were at the knees ; and if the women only knew how badly they walked, and how atrociously they put their clothes on, I'm sure they would be content to sit down much more and parade less. I don't want to condemn every-

body to sit down all day. I'm an eminently reasonable person. It's quite legitimate to walk about for a while after breakfast, which I never do, and before dinner, which I nearly always do; but just as I expect people to dress suitably, so I expect them to parade seasonably. I can't read with people passing up and down in front of me. I always feel an irresistible fascination to look up, which I immediately regret as I see some figure which I have seen a hundred times before, and of which I know bysight every angle and peculiarity, prancing, doddering, or slouching past me as the case might be. Oh, if we could only see ourselves as others see us! I'm not sure, though, Perhaps it's just as well we can't, since if we could, the number of suicides among sensitive people would be awful. They never would survive the first shock. Full knowledge would be fatal, I fear, but half the truth, I think, would be most salutary. I did once when I was young try to start a society for benefiting mankind by telling people exactly what you thought of them in the hope that it might lead to the improvement of the race. I remember mentioning the idea to an Irish R. M. who was staying with us at the time. He got quite excited, and wanted to know all about the society, as he said he felt it would lead to murder, and that he had quite enough work to do already. I'm inclined to think that Irish R. M. was about right. However, the idea never got any farther than Dorothy, Bob, and myself. We agreed to tell each other exactly what we thought of one another whenever occasion arose.

But when, the very first day, I told Bob that he was a nasty, ill-bred, ill-mannered little boy, and Dorothy that she was a silly little fool, they became quite rude, and told me about things that I couldn't possibly help. Dorothy even referred to my nose, which has always been rather a tender subject with me. Though, of course, one knows that great men always have big noses; yet one would so much rather be great without having a big nose too. So my early attempts at benefiting humanity by starting a mutual criticism society died a speedy death.

It was horribly hot in the Indian Ocean, and I guess that accounted a good deal for one's feeling of irritation and dissatisfaction with things in general. I began to wonder what they were doing at home—which is always a fatal sign—and to feel that I had never appreciated even Aunt Agatha. I smiled as I thought of the many things flannel lying peaceably at the bottom of my trunks. One had required nothing but the lightest of garments since Port Said, and I scoffed again at the warnings that we should find it cold in India. This was the beginning of December, and there wasn't the sign of a cold breeze even. Of course, India would be much hotter. Ermyintrude, suffering greatly in the second-class, told daily the tale of yet another garment perforce discarded.

The day before we reached Bombay I was thinking chiefly of Boy. He had not been to sit beside me nearly so often since my talk with Mrs. Simpkin-Briston, and I felt certain that that horrible woman

was the cause of it. But I never let Boy see that I noticed. It's always such a mistake to let a man know that you miss him. Let him guess that, and he will stay away, hugging himself and thinking how important he is, and how much he's being missed, and enjoying himself much more somewhere else than he would have done if he had been kept in doubt as to whether he was being missed or not. So I just smiled on Boy as usual whenever he did come, and never let him see I noticed how seldom he had come lately.

It was just before dinner on the last night. They had been playing cricket, and Boy was in his cricketing things, rather flushed, but very happy. He came and sat down beside me just in the old way.

'Well,' he said cheerily, 'are you glad we land to-morrow?'

'Yes, very,' I said; 'aren't you?'

'I don't know,' he answered after a second's pause, as he unconsciously slipped into his old familiar attitude. 'I've had such an awfully good time on board; I'm half sorry it's over.'

Perhaps it is as well that people's ideas of a good time vary.

'What are you going to do as soon as you land?' I asked warily, knowing that I was treading on dangerous ground.

'I expect I shall find orders awaiting me,' he said. 'I'm still uncertain where I shall be sent. It may be Anundpur, or, again, it may be Bandanager. It's rather exciting not knowing whether it may

be a thousand miles north or a thousand miles south.'

But he hadn't really answered my question, and I think he knew it.

'We are putting up at The Grand until we leave Bombay,' I said. 'You will come and see us, and tell us where you are sent to, won't you?'

'I'm staying with a friend in the fort,' he said, 'but I shall be sure to come round and see you before I go.' He looked round at me with his fresh, cheery smile. How I longed to take him by the shoulders and shake him, and tell him what a stupid, dear stupid young fool he was. He was suddenly in great spirits.

'I was going to ask you to do something I want very much,' he said, cheerily.

Now it may have been that I winced, remembering that last thing he had asked me to do for him and what had come of it, or it may have been that he really did change his mind.

'But I don't think I'll ask you now,' he continued, laughing as he watched my face. 'I'll put it off till a more convenient season. Good-bye.' And he went off, smiling back at me, while I sat there, wondering what it was he wanted of me, and what it was that had made me suddenly afraid to ask him what it was then and there.

CHAPTER V

WE LAND ON INDIAN SOIL

I AM not going to rhapsodise over the entry into Bombay Harbour. I am sure lots of other people have done that, and made of themselves horrid bores. In fact, I am not going to rhapsodise over anything in this book, except—well, perhaps I shall once or twice when I come to the dear little Shan chiefs at the Durbar with their quaint, wide, pagoda-hats, or perhaps the state entry, or Boy Patiala, or Sir Pertab Singh and the Imperial Cadets, or the State Ball in the Dewani Khas (or the Dewani Am, which was it? I never could remember which was which; they confused me as much as starboard and port on board ship, only, luckily, they didn't lead to such dreadful consequences), or the beautiful Vice-Reine, with her wonderful jewels, or—well, perhaps there are just a few things I must rhapsodise over later on, but they are not so hackneyed as Bombay Harbour. That is always there on view, and you have only got to take a ticket by P. and O., and there you are in fourteen days. That's the great mistake of being always on view—

one never gets half the appreciation one deserves. That's really why I came out to India as I have already explained. I thought that a temporary disappearance from the scene at home would be most salutary—for myself and friends. For there was no disguising the fact that I had been on view for quite a respectable number of seasons.

The heat as we landed at Bombay was something frightful. It seemed to settle down upon you as you left the launch and stepped on to the Apollo Bunder. It sort of gathered round you like a thick, stifling veil, and you had to fight to get your breath through it. I felt quite helpless by the time we had struggled through the customs. Marjory, of course, was worse than useless. She had been torn with apprehension that she would be seasick on the launch, but the only effect of her having avoided that humiliation was to make her collapse with thankfulness on the largest and most comfortable trunk she could see within reach as soon as she got on shore, quite oblivious of the fact that she was horribly in everybody's way. So we sent her at last with a handbag to sit in a carriage outside, while Lady Manifold, Ermyntrude, and I talked wildly to strange men of a strange and wondrous hue. Ermyntrude proved a veritable heroine, but of course Lady Manifold made most noise. She had once been in Portugal, she had told us on the launch as we neared the shore, and she knew how to manage these Portuguese. She waved her hand grandiloquently towards the crowd of Goanese, Lascar-like men upon the Bunder.

She spoke in Portuguese and her own most gracious manner to one very superior-looking man in white drill. I confess I should not have hesitated to receive him as a distinguished foreigner if I had met him in the West. He looked at Lady Manifold for a moment after she had spoken as if she had been some strange animal just let out of the Zoo. Then—

‘Missus showing Missus’ things, me doing everything,’ he said quietly.

It was rather a shock, but Lady Manifold bore it well, and accepted things as they were, induced thereto by a keen desire for the recovery of much luggage. That man was certainly a treasure, however doubtful his nationality may have been. He just bustled about straight away, and reduced chaos to order. Even Lady Manifold’s numerous and contradictory directions didn’t confuse him. He just went on quietly with his work, ordering coolies and marshalling our array of boxes with delightful unconcern. Only once Lady Manifold’s anxious attention was diverted from her luggage. A particularly unclothed coolie brushed close by, balancing the hugest of dress-trunks on his head. I admired him immensely, with his brown, shiny body, so strong and lissome and well-developed, and moving easily and gracefully along beneath a burden that would have broken the neck or softened the brain of any of one’s men friends at home. But Lady Manifold was horrified.

‘Oh,’ she said, with a shocked glance at the sublimely unconscious, offending coolie, ‘I almost

regret I brought Marjory. I do trust we shall not see any more so absolutely devoid of shame as that.'

Poor Lady Manifold! I guess she saw some hundreds of thousands quite as scantily clothed as that before she reached Bombay again, but I don't think she ever got so used to them as not to feel a shock each time she saw one. Marjory once horrified her by declaring that she should love them if only they were clean. If it were possible to horrify her more than that, I did it. 'I like them just as they are,' I remember saying, 'unwashed, unkempt, rather odoriferous, but very picturesque.' I think Lady Manifold has regarded me as something very modern ever since. But this is anticipating. It isn't really till you come to go away that you begin to feel with how firm a grip the life of India has taken hold of you, how you love the naked little nut-brown babies playing in the sun, and how the very savour of the East lingers in the nostrils with a strange regret.

But as yet I am only on the Apollo Bunder, and getting my first glimpse of a coolie on his native heath, and sniffing the air daintily as he passes, not quite sure at first if I am going to like him. Marjory, when we joined her outside, was undergoing the same experience. She was looking quite animated.

'Oh,' she said, as we got into the carriage beside her, 'I've never seen men like this before. Just look at that man there.'

I looked, and I blush to write it, though I must

do so, as I started out to give a full and true account of my Indian experiences, but I must say I blush to write it—that man was wearing his shirt outside. I thought at first that he must have forgotten to dress himself completely. I remember myself once to have gone out without a waist-belt, but, of course, the effect could not have been anything like so bad as this. But it was soon borne in upon me that the wearing of the shirt outside was a common custom of the country. Of course, it is only a recent custom. It's just typical of what Western civilization has done so far for India. Like new cloth on an old garment, it has just patched itself on in an obvious, startling, ugly patch, absolutely ruining the charm of things Eastern and picturesque. So utterly unlike, it seems impossible they should ever merge gracefully the one into the other. If civilized man only realised his responsibilities in the matter of dress alone, I am convinced that he would speedily evolve something less hideous than his present-day attire. If only every Englishman could see himself caricatured in some ambitious native! Fortunately, we women haven't so much to answer for in this respect. True, a native woman in a Parisian costume is a sight for the gods, but that isn't so much the fault of the Parisian costume. Besides, these are mercifully rare so far. The Indian woman is a nice, shy, retiring sort of creature, very backward, and really without much use for new fashioned costumes, as she is never allowed out to show them off. And a woman, after all, only really cares about dress for other people to see. We should all get slouchy

if we were shut up by ourselves without a chance of our best young man or our deadliest rival dropping in unexpected-like. But for what reason men dress—as they do—I never could quite discover. They can't possibly think that they look nice in hideous things like trousers, that get creased and baggy at the knees whatever care you take—at least, Bob says so—and a coat and waistcoat that show off to the full every awkward line and curve. And as for a man's dress-suit! The only decent thing he has got is a frock-coat, and that is never allowed out without that most hideous of head-gears, a topper. Men talk about women being the slaves of fashion. But it is nothing compared with the depth of the slavery of men. Why, there isn't a single one of them with the courage to break away, and start out on a new line on his own. And the comic part of it is that they nearly all agree that their present-day dress is hideous. Yet they go on wearing it like a lot of sheep simply because everybody else does. In fact, so deeply are they enthralled that it's considered quite bad form—so Bob says—to diverge, even to the smallest extent, from the common ruck. You get called a 'bounder' if you let your desire for colour or originality break out too loudly in a waistcoat or a tie. But if men could only see the terrible effect their style of costume is having upon the native mind and landscape, I really do think they would hold a meeting in Hyde Park, and change it. The poor native, seeing that the Englishman is on top just now, thinks that he must be right in the matter of clothes

too. And so he copies him as far as he can go. On the top of a native *dhoti*, mysteriously wound about him, the Babu sports an English shirt, with no attempt to conceal the lower ends, which an Englishman always modestly leaves to your imagination. Add to this a fair length of brown leg, gorgeous parti-coloured socks—sometimes held up by suspenders—and patent leather shoes, and, as Ermyntrude said as to the result, she never could have believed it. When the Babu takes a fancy to the tall silk hat—he has already developed a weakness for the preposterous round stiff collar—the effect will be complete.

We didn't quite know whether we were disappointed or not with Bombay as we drove through the streets to the hotel. It was a bit too Continental and not quite Eastern enough for my taste; but, as Lady Manifold said, we must reserve our final judgment, as we hadn't yet seen the railway-station and Malabar Hill, both of which we had been told were beautiful.

That Bombay Hotel was certainly a revelation. They had put Ermyntrude in a tent on the roof to start with.

'Oh, miss!' said Ermyntrude when she descended after having seen it, 'it gives me quite a turn to think of sleeping there. Supposing—oh, miss!'

Ermyntrude's left hand felt about for the region of her heart, and speech failed her. I tried to reassure her.

'But oh, miss, on the roof! on the roof!' she groaned despairingly, recovering her garrulity.

‘And it’s that exposed, miss, and the canvas that thin, I’m sure my every action will be silhouetted for all who wants to see when there’s a lamp alight inside of it. And oh, miss, to have no door to lock at nights, and to lie there open all round, a kind of tempting thieves and robbers and such-like persons to come and do their worst! Oh, miss, I never should have thought it. I came prepared like for this savage country, miss, but to think that I should spend the very first night on the roof, miss! Oh, I never should have thought I could have done it!’

It was not until the manager had assured us that no other room of any kind was available that Ermyntrude became resigned. ‘A cellar, even a cellar,’ she had urged pathetically while there was yet hope, ‘anywhere, miss, where I can be a bit more private like.’ But the manager had shaken his head. So there was nothing left for Ermyntrude but to retire to her tent upon the roof, where the heat, she told me afterwards, was ‘like a foresight of ’ell, so to speak, miss.’ But even that she preferred to the lonely watches of the night, which were ‘that gruesome you couldn’t sleep for thinking of all the nasty wicked things you’d done and feeling sorry.’

There didn’t seem to be any attempt to make things comfortable in that hotel. I thought at first, when they showed me my room, that there must be spring-cleaning on. There was nothing in it except the bare necessities of life—no carpet, only a narrow strip of matting on the floor; a bed, a

dressing-table, and one chair. There were only two things to be said for that room—it was lofty, and it had a bath-room attached. But the fact that it was lofty didn't make it airy. There was a big long window, but it looked straight out on to a dead wall, and that room had a nasty sort of mouldy smell about it that wasn't Eastern at all, but very much Western and Bloomsbury. I felt that if I were going to be ill a Bombay hotel was the very last place I should choose as a *mise en scène*. As for the cooking and the meals, I never felt so devoutly thankful before that I had a strong constitution. Lady Manifold is a yellow sort of person at the best of times, and she was quite knocked up after the first day, and fell back on soups and puddings. I suppose it was that I expected too much. I had looked upon India as the land of fruit, and I imagined that the tables in Bombay would be groaning beneath a wealth of mangoes, melons, pomegranates, and bananas. The first they told me were not in season; the second and third I lost my patience in trying to describe to an idiotic Bombay boy; while the last was the only fruit that they provided us with, and that of such a quality that it must have been extremely economical from the managerial point of view, for no one ate it.

Mentioning a Bombay 'boy' reminds me of the curious habit people have out here of calling their servants 'boys.' The first time I heard someone call out for his servant I thought he must be calling my soldier-boy friend on board, and it took me some time to get out of the way of thinking of him

every time I heard his name and expecting to hear his cheery voice in response. Nobody could tell me why they called their servants 'boys.' It's like so many other things in India of which no one can tell you the why and wherefore. Things are there, and you've just got to take them as you find them. If you go and rout about trying to discover the reason why, you'll get looked at quite askance. Most people out there are content to live for years without ever attempting to lift the veil of mystery that hides the real India, and so they naturally resent it if a newcomer exhibits an inquiring turn of mind. And people don't like being asked questions that they can't answer. It's disconcerting, and it kinds of lowers you in your own estimation, and there's nothing more unforgivable than that. So when, the very first day I landed, I offended at least three people by asking them why they called their servants 'boy,' I began to feel that I was attempting to acquire knowledge at too great a cost, and gave it up. So I joined the throng, and called my servant 'boy.'

But it's really a ridiculous custom. Some one calls out 'Boy,' and up trots an old man with a white beard. You think there must be some mistake, and that he can't be 'boy,' yet the sahib shows no surprise at his appearance, and gives him the intended order quite casually. It doesn't matter how old you may be, you are doomed to be called 'boy' for the term of your natural life, if you happen to be born to that form of service. But the servant question hasn't yet arisen in the East

as it has in the West, and you can call your servant what you like with impunity. And you generally call him much worse names than 'boy.'

One of the trials of that Bombay hotel was that it was filled with a whole crowd of Arethusians. Now one of the chief reasons why I had drawn such a sigh of relief as I first caught sight of Bombay Harbour was that henceforth my fellow-passengers would be no more seen. But they just littered themselves all around on shore. You ran up against them everywhere, especially against the ones you most wanted to avoid. Then, too, some of them seemed suddenly to be upon their native heath again, and took on strange and wondrous hues. The member of the Board of Revenue swelled visibly, and even his poor little wife brightened up, doubtless reflecting that now she took precedence of all but two or three ladies within an area of I don't know how many hundred square miles, and I suppose a thought like that must inflate one. Of course as luck would have it they had the table next to ours, while not far away loomed the authoress, radiating satisfaction at the stores of new copy she was rapidly gathering up. I sighed as I thought how impossible it would be for me ever to enjoy the delightful book that would evolve. I wonder how many of one's favourite books one would lose interest in if one met the distinguished authors themselves. Perhaps it's just as well that writers of books haven't come much my way, so some of my ideals still hold.

Of course we went for a drive round Malabar

Hill. I graciously allowed Major Street to take us. Now I said I wasn't going to rhapsodise over Bombay Harbour. So I won't. But I can see again that first glorious Indian sunset even now, with its myriad dancing lights reflected in the clear blue mirror of the sea, silently merging and stealing one by one away beyond the far dim line where sky and ocean met. I was just revelling in it, and letting myself be carried away by it, and feeling that I wanted nothing more in this life—in fact, fast reducing myself after the trials and worries of board-ship life to a state of absolute and perfect contentment, when Major Street, just like a man, suddenly upset everything and made me forget the view and most other things straight away.

CHAPTER VI

AN AMAZING MARRIAGE

‘THE Boy is going to be married to-morrow morning at eleven o’clock, and he wants you to go to the church,’ the Major blurted out, turning and facing me suddenly, squaring himself with a half-defiant, half-apologetic sort of air, as if he guessed something of the storm his words would rouse.

We had left the carriages, and were strolling along in advance of the others, and nothing could have been more peaceful and amicable than we were just then, gazing at the sunset. His words fell like a thunderclap, and I stopped dumfounded and gazed at him. Though I knew that Boy had got it seriously, I had never really faced such an awful actuality as this.

For the moment I could find no words adequate to the occasion. I simply stood still and gazed at Major Street, and I noticed that he seemed to kind of squirm and wince. I have been told that I’ve got an expressive face, and if it expressed a half of what I felt just then, well, I guess it said lots. I was right down furious, and there being no

one else handy, I had of course, womanlike, to vent it on the Major.

‘It’s all your fault,’ I burst out angrily. ‘If you had only gone the right way to work, a man of your position and experience—especially a man who has won the Kadir Cup,’ I put in scornfully, ‘could have made that Boy do anything he wanted, while instead of that you calmly come and ask me to go and see him make a right down fool of himself.’

I paused for breath, while the Major got rather red in the face. I’m sure if I had been a man he would have knocked me down, or said something dreadful, but being only a woman who was taking an unwarrantable advantage of her sex, he said nothing. That, of course, made me more angry still. If you want to annoy an angry woman, just say nothing. But if you happen to be that woman’s husband, well, then, you’d best say something mighty quick, just for the sake of keeping the home together.

I turned away, and looked out across the glorious peaceful waters of the harbour bathed in the sunset glow. It quieted me a bit straight away, as nature always does, but I wasn’t going to show that to the Major. It never does to show a man that you are quieting down. He at once plucks up his courage, and gets above himself again if you do. Men are all right so long as you hold the whip hand of them, but once let go the reins and they begin to buck.

‘You can tell the Boy,’ I said haughtily at last,

getting tired even of looking at the beautiful waters of the bay and seeing that Major Street did not intend to speak, 'you can tell the Boy that I very much regret that I cannot attend his wedding. And now,' I added, turning back towards the carriage, 'if you are really quite ready, we will drive home.'

Of course, I knew all the time that it was quite unreasonable to be angry with Major Street. He, poor man, couldn't help the innocence of the Boy or the craft and subtlety of the woman. But there was nobody else, and, you see, I'm one of those people who must vent their wrath on somebody, and it naturally falls on the unfortunate person nearest—who, by the way, is often one's dearest too. I like to explode my wrath straight away and get it over. Of course, it's hard luck on the people who happen to get in the way at the time, but still it's so much better than being sulky. I know I was quite unreasonable just then, but no gentle reader with any experience whatever ever does expect the heroine to be reasonable. Just think what would happen to all the plots that hang on some little misunderstanding that never would have happened if the heroine had only been even just the least little bit reasonable.

It was rather a silent drive home. I had quite made up my mind that I didn't like Bombay at all. My views of a place, and of people too, always depend upon my frame of mind at the moment that I see them. What my frame of mind depends on is, of course, an unknown quantity. Lady Manifold's

always depends upon the capacity of the cook who cooked her last meal. But mine is not like that. I rather wish I did know what mine really does depend upon, though perhaps if there was anything dependable about it, it might make one lose interest in one's self. It's just the variety that is so fascinating. When people say, 'Ah, so-and-so is so charming—always the same, you know,' I at once think how very dull that so-and-so must be. Now that variety, contrariness, never-know-your-luck sort of feeling about women is just what appeals to the born gamblers that all men really are. They never know what a woman is going to do next, and that keeps the interest going. Just take my advice if you really want to hook a man, and just be as variable as ever you can. Look at him for five minutes as if there was nobody else in the world, and talk like it too. Then suddenly get pensive as if you were thinking of another 'him' far away. Then brighten up and beam on any other 'him' you find handy—but this must be done with care and skill, with a glance out of the corner of your eye upon the real 'him,' lest you go too far and put him off. But, I forgot, I'm driving home along the Bombay streets with the Major, very cross and grumpy.

I'm bound to say Major Street has an angelic temper. But I guess it isn't quite the thing for a man to be rude to a woman, and it's partly that. I always do think that we take advantage of men that way. We treat them anyhow because we know they can't answer back. Now, we're ever so much

more careful with our own sex, because we know they won't hesitate to give us as good as they get. So it's a woman's privilege to be rude to men, and I regret to say we use it to the full.

Well, Major Street and I will never get back to that hotel if I keep running off the lines like this. We had got nearly there before the Major referred to the all-important subject again.

'I have to leave by to-night's train, so I can't see Boy through with it,' was all he said. It was his way of asking me again to go and countenance this amazing marriage.

'Nothing will induce me to go,' I said freezingly, as I got out of the carriage. 'Please tell the Boy that I am very sorry I cannot come.'

I passed on up the hotel steps, but like a woman, halfway, I half relented. I had been rather a brute to poor Major Street, and it really wasn't even just a little bit his fault. I turned round sharp midway up those steps. He was standing at the bottom of them, looking up after me with the most comical mixture of amusement and annoyance I have ever seen on any man's face. I beamed down upon him. He really was rather nice-looking.

'I'm so sorry you haven't had a pleasanter companion on the drive home,' I said.

He ran up half a dozen steps.

'So you will go to-morrow morning?' he asked eagerly.

Now, wasn't that just like a man. Only because I had turned round and smiled on him just to

show there was no ill feeling he went and jumped straight away to the conclusion that I had caved in altogether right there. If you give any man an inch, he'll take an ell. I know, for I have given many men inches in my time and they all right there on the spot took ells straight away. I guess nine out of ten Englishmen don't even know the meaning of tact and finesse. Whenever there's a woman in the case they're no good at all. They just blurt out what they think, and they grab at the slightest encouragement as if you were a lifebuoy, and they were quite out of their depth and couldn't swim for nuts. Now most women dislike being made lifebuoys of. It crumples one's dresses and upsets one's hair much too much for any self-respecting woman to stand it. A woman likes fishing with a fly, like an angler for trout, and the more the trout nibbles and won't hang on the keener she gets. If that silly trout and his prototype, man, only knew, and kept on just nibbling, they would hold our interest ten times longer than they do. But when they swallow the bait whole right over the hook every time, well, it gets a bit wearisome anyway.

But Major Street and I are still standing on those steps.

'So you will go to-morrow?' he was saying again, as I looked down at him pityingly. He was so horribly in earnest, and I confess I always feel a sort of weakness somewhere round the corners of my heart when I see a strong man in earnest. That's why I am always so afraid that I shall get

married some day and regret it afterwards. But I've survived quite a lot of earnestness already, so I suppose I am not really as weak as I sometimes feel.

'No,' I said sternly, 'certainly not. I absolutely refuse to countenance such a disgraceful marriage as that by being present.'

But the Major was a man who refused to take 'no' for an answer. He's the kind that will propose six times if necessary, but will get there in the end.

'Boy will be disappointed if you don't go,' he said, 'and it isn't as if your not going would do any good. If it would, I shouldn't ask you to go.'

'That's true enough,' I murmured, feeling that I was suddenly giving way to a man's logic. If my husband, when I get one, proves logical, then I'll find myself taking a back seat straight away. But you don't catch me marrying a logician if I can get anything else.

But just as I had said 'that's true enough' with a giving-way sort of feeling, I caught sight of Boy and that dreadful woman driving up to the hotel, and for the moment I was saved.

'If you don't stop that marriage taking place,' I said, laying my hand impressively on the Major's arm as I hurriedly turned to go, 'I—I'll never speak to you again.'

Then I fled into the hotel. I remember it struck me afterwards that it wasn't much of a threat to make to a man with a wife and three grown-up

children, but it was all I could think of at the moment and it had to do.

I was afraid to go down to dinner that night for fear I might meet Boy. If he asked me to my face I knew I was not the sort of person to say 'no.' That's just me all over. I know what I think, and generally just say it straight out. That's one thing. But to do it, that's quite another thing altogether. I'm conscious of a weak sort of feeling underneath that would make me do quite other than what I said. It's a great mistake to have a strong brain and a weak heart. But still, anything's better than a weak head.

I didn't sleep much that first night in India, though I was dead tired. I kept thinking of snakes, and I didn't only think of cockroaches, I saw them. Big fat ones they were—you could hear them in imagination scrunch under your feet if you stepped on them. Then, too, I had never slept inside mosquito curtains before. They are a kind of net hung round from four posts at the corners of the bed, covered in across the top and tucked in under the mattress below. It's a bit stuffy inside, but when you're in a country where all sorts of awful creepy things are as like as not crawling over the floor and up the legs of your bed, they're a real comfort, let alone keeping out the mosquitoes, which they are really meant for. So you can guess I tucked mine in tight under the mattress that first night after having seen cockroaches and imagined snakes.

Well, I fell asleep at last, but only to wake

with a start to find an apparition in white standing by my bed. It gave me a real right down shock. And if you had suddenly awoke and found that face peering down at you through the curtains, I guess you'd have had a shock too. White, rolling eyeballs seemed positively to bulge out of a black bearded face, and it kind of gave me wild waking thoughts of Blue Beard and the Arabian Nights as I leapt up in bed. The apparition took a sudden step backward as I sat up. Then I began to remember where I was. I don't think there's anything more awful than the first waking moment when you don't quite realise where you are.

'Missy wanting morning tea?' said an oily cringing voice that suddenly brought back recollection. And then I grew bold as I remembered I was in a country where strange and fearsome things happened, though, as a general rule, not dangerous to Europeans if they took sufficient precautions. So I pulled up the mosquito curtains on the side whence the voice came, and thrust out my head. A white-robed kitmatgar, balancing a small tea tray in one hand and salaaming profoundly with the other, proved to be the owner of the fearsome bulgy eyes. I looked at him angrily. I always do feel particularly angry with the person nearest to hand whenever I have had a fright. And there was nothing even very bulgy about his eyes when he raised them after his profound salaam. Perhaps it was only the sight of me asleep that made his eyes bulge out like that.

I took my tea and sent for Ermyntude. She

came rather pale and subdued, and, I think, a bit resentful that her prediction had not been fulfilled and that nothing awful had happened to her in the night on the roof. It was only just seven o'clock, but from the noise that was going on in the hotel, everyone seemed to be up and about. So I got up too. The only thing that I really enjoyed about my stay in that Bombay hotel was the luxury of a bathroom, adjoining my bedroom, all to myself. There was no furtive slinking along passages thickly populated with unknown doors on either side, no undignified scurrying at the sight of a man at the other end, no leaning over banisters anxiously watching one's chance and finally running a dead heat with the lady you particularly disliked from the floor below. I cannot think why people don't take to building houses in this style at home. If you have ever once enjoyed the luxury of a bathroom attached to your bedroom all to yourself, you will never be happy again with a bathroom at the end of the passage or on the floor below.

Neither Lady Manifold nor Marjory appeared at breakfast, and I hurried back to my room to hunt out one of my smartest frocks and hats—something not too gay but quite smart enough for a quiet wedding. For, of course, when it came to the point, there really wasn't any question of my going to Boy's wedding. I was even going to be quite sweet to Fluffy. I had vague notions of helping her back along the road to social success, and all sorts of nice things on Boy's behalf.

It was just ten o'clock by my watch by the time I was ready. Major Street had told me that the wedding was to be at eleven o'clock at St. Jude's, so I thought I should have time to go and buy Boy a present on the way. The hotel porter got me what he called a 'phitton gari'—a ramshackle sort of affair, driven by a wild-looking Jehu in dirty blue and yellow and drawn by two skinny horses, their harness tied with string and their food in a sack with a bundle of hay tied on behind. It wasn't at all the kind of conveyance you would choose to take you to a wedding, but I've been to one in a 'dandy' since then, and that's less dignified still. We had just started off when I suddenly remembered. There's something always wrong about the time in India. It's either half an hour too fast or half an hour too slow. It's like the starboard and the port side of a ship, nobody not to the manner born ever can remember which. There's one time known as local and another known as railway, and one is half an hour or so faster than the other—I'm afraid to say which just now on the spur of the moment. If you want to go by train, then the time is either half an hour ahead or behind the local time, I forget which, but it comes a bit awkward if you can't remember when you want to catch a train. Why it should be so nobody knows. Yet everybody passively submits in a helpless sort of way, in spite of the inconvenience of it. Talk about the survival of antiquated ideas at home, why, it's nothing to the survival of them in India. Just think what this uncertainty about

the time is responsible for. It ruins the temper and breaks up the home, and yet nobody takes the trouble to alter it. The frightful recrimination it leads to between husband and wife is only one of its results. Say you and your husband are going out to dine. You neither of you can remember at the last minute whether the time is half an hour behind or half an hour ahead of what it ought to be. Now, being a woman, you know that nothing annoys a hostess more than her guests arriving half an hour too early, just when she's combing out her back hair, preparatory to twisting it up into a fascinating knot somewhere on top. The sound of early arrivals when she is only at that early stage of her toilet flusters her, and if a woman gets flustered before she begins to receive her guests that dinner is just doomed to failure right away. So the wife going out to dinner, knowing how she would feel herself if guests arrived half an hour too soon, insists upon her husband waiting half an hour before they start. Then, of course, they arrive half an hour too late, and the husband as they creep apologetically into the room full of angry, hungry people, whispers, 'I told you so,' and, of course, that upsets his wife, and she'd cry straight away if she dared. As for the hostess, with the soup getting cold and the other guests getting violent with hunger, she's got ruffled long ago. So that dinner, owing to the odd half hour either way, doesn't get a chance. Of course, you do have luck sometimes, and hit upon the exact time right there, but the chances are about ten to one against.

Yet nothing would induce people in India to bestir themselves and get everybody to keep the same time. It's just apathy. They much prefer to get hustled and lose their tempers and their best friends at the same time rather than take the amount of trouble necessary to set things right once and for all.

Well, in consequence of this elusive half hour in the Indian time, a strange thing happened. It was ten o'clock, as I have said, by my watch. That might mean that it was only half past nine or it might mean that it was half past ten. That wouldn't matter a bit on an ordinary day in India, when time is of no account whatever, but on a wedding day one likes to strike the right time somewhere near about anyway. Well, it was no good my asking even if there had been anybody in sight to ask, because I knew I should forget again straight away within the next five minutes, so I thought I had best go right on to the church, and leave the shopping until afterwards. If I was somehow late already there was nothing for it but to drive fast. If I was early I could sit in St. Jude's, and work up a suitable wedding march frame of mind.

The driver deposited me at St. Jude's, and demanded quite twice the proper fare, which I meekly paid him, having no command of the language, and not wishing to create a scandal on the church steps on a wedding morning. The door was just ajar, and I cautiously pushed it open and passed inside. Then I was aware at once that I was late

after all, and that the wedding had begun. There, at the far end of the church, at the chancel steps, stood the bride and bridegroom, a second man by the bridegroom's side and the vergers hovering near by, with the clergyman reading the service in a subdued voice. Annoyed at being late, I tiptoed noiselessly up the aisle, and took a seat about six rows from the top. For a moment I knelt down, and then, getting up, I looked for the first time full at the bridal party. The shock of surprise I got was just about the biggest I have ever had, and I've had a good many in my day. I rubbed my eyes in petrified astonishment. There was Fluffy, large as life, but beside her stood not Boy but the dodderly old General! I was so astonished that I plumped down heavily on the seat behind me. Of course, it creaked and groaned a bit under the sudden contact with my ten stone eight, and the whole wedding party looked round with a caught-in-the-very-act sort of jump. I suppose I did look a bit comic sitting there all alone. I have said before that I'm told that I have got an expressive face, and if it expressed just then the half of my surprise, eyes and mouth must have been open just as wide as they would go. Fluffy smiled. It was a wicked grin of triumph that made me feel cat-like and longing to scream, while the General and fatuous Major somebody or other who supported him looked as confused as two school-boys found out of bounds without leave. The clergyman paused, noticing my surprise and the wedding-party's guilty start, and looked as if he half believed he was

going to hear for once in his life those most improbable words, 'I forbid the banns.' Then they all turned round again, and nothing happening, he hurried on, and before I had quite recovered my breath, they had all passed into the vestry. I found myself sitting in an empty church, with only the verger still hovering about and regarding me suspiciously. But I sat on. I didn't feel quite collected enough to get up and out of sight before the wedding party came out. Besides, I thought it would be rather sport to see the dodderly old General and his bride coming out arm in arm. I hadn't had time to analyse my feelings yet. Of course, I was wildly glad for Boy's sake, and yet in an awful state of mind as to how he would take it. But I hadn't long to think. The vestry door opened, and the clergyman came out, closing it behind him. It was evident that the bridal party had left by another door. The clergyman, who was quite young and curate-like, came down the aisle, and I suddenly got up to meet him.

'Can you tell me the time?' I asked him breathlessly.

He looked at me rather doubtfully before pulling out his watch. Doubtless I did seem rather a strange young woman, rushing into his church in the middle of a private sort of wedding and flopping down in surprise on one of his pews like that.

'It's just twenty minutes past ten,' he said coldly.

'Then,' I said slowly, wondering if Boy already

knew, 'aren't you expecting another wedding at eleven o'clock?'

'Yes,' he said, looking at me as if waiting for me to say something more.

'But you've just married the bride to somebody else,' I said, surveying him reproachfully, as if he were to blame. I felt I must have my revenge upon him for thinking me a strange young woman.

A momentary look of horror flashed across the poor man's face. He looked as if it might really have been possible for him to mix up the couples and make an awful hash of things.

'Do you know what the eleven o'clock bride's name is?' I asked, before he could gather his wits to reply.

'No,' he stammered, still with the startled look in his eyes. 'But, of course, it will be on the special license which I've got in the vestry. I will get it at once.'

He trotted off, and I awaited his return impatiently. Supposing Boy should come and find me there instead of his bride! It would be a bit awkward, to say the least, especially as the bride would never turn up to relieve the situation. But the clergyman quickly trotted back with a paper in his hand, and a troubled look on his face.

'It's just as you said, I've married the eleven o'clock bride to the ten o'clock bridegroom, but no one could say it was my fault,' he said pathetically, holding out the papers to me. 'You see, her name is in both licenses.'

‘Oh,’ I said, glancing at them, ‘what a dreadful, brazen woman.’

‘It’s the most extraordinary thing I ever heard,’ he exclaimed helplessly.

‘Extraordinary!’ I cried excitedly, and, I’m afraid, raising my voice, ‘it’s the wickedest, most deceitful, most devilish——’

‘Hush, oh, hush, my dear young lady,’ said the clergyman, looking round nervously, as if he thought the very stones would fall on us at my desecrating words.

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘I won’t stay here to use any more strong language. I’ll just hustle straight away, and leave you to tell the eleven o’clock bridegroom that you’ve married his bride to somebody else at ten o’clock.’

I picked up my sunshade and prepared to go.

‘I’d much rather you stayed,’ he said anxiously, putting out his hand and almost touching me on the arm.

But my reply was arrested on my lips. The door at the far end of the church opened joyfully—I always think you can tell the temperament of anyone behind an opening door by the way they open it—and Boy’s radiant figure stood silhouetted against the light from without.

I looked round wildly, the vestry was my only chance of escape. I made for it with all speed.

‘Be sure you break it to him gently,’ I said as I brushed the anxious clergyman aside.

‘I do so wish you would stay and help me,’ I heard him say plaintively as I disappeared into the vestry. But my heart was hardened against his appeal, for I could not meet Boy and tell him that his trust was betrayed, even though I was so glad that it had been betrayed just in time.

CHAPTER VII

THREE OLD MAIDS

AT Bombay I said good-bye to Lady Manifold and Marjory. They were going up to stay with friends in Jeypore and then on to Delhi, where we should meet again. I'm sorry, but I must confess it, that I parted from Marjory without regret. She had been all very well as a casual sort of acquaintance at home, but after having lived with her for over a fortnight, I hadn't anything left to say to her. She was one of those people who make you feel positively tired after you've lived with them a bit. She made me just dumb, and I'm not often taken that way. I guess it is that she isn't a woman's woman. She has got plenty to say to anything that calls itself a man, but I suppose it is she doesn't take the trouble to make herself pleasant to women. It's a mistake, because a man at heart really likes a woman's woman best. He'll flirt right enough with the one, but he'll marry the other.

Berengaria was stationed at Slumpanuggur, a fearsome railway journey distant from Bombay,

and thither, after a few days' sight seeing, Eryntrude and I set out to join her. The train left at night after dinner, and being warned, I had taken the precaution to book our seats well ahead. The crush of traffic consequent on the Great Durbar had already begun, and we were fully prepared to find the train service a bit erratic. Yet as I walked down the platform, accompanied by Lady Manifold and Marjory, who had come to see me off, I still cherished fond hopes that I might find a carriage all to myself. It isn't that I'm unsociable, but when I travel I like to spread myself, and you can't do that in a railway carriage with four other people trying to do the same. It isn't that I'm modest either, but I confess I don't like getting undressed with three pairs of eyes upon me. Still less do I like trying to hang all my garments on one peg. Besides, every one of us has her own little ways about things that one doesn't want to expose to the ridicule of the public gaze.

Imagine my disgust when I found the names of Mrs. and Miss Cardew over two of the other three berths in my compartment. They were some of the many uninteresting people on board the *Arethusa* whom I haven't mentioned. Mrs. Cardew was a bore, and Miss Cardew was plain and pimply, and I hadn't any use for either of them. Now I always believe in acting promptly. So I quickly and quietly removed the cards that bore their names from over the berths and tearing them up into small and unrecognisable pieces, I dropped them out on to the line. Then I turned round quite

pleased with myself to find the guard looking in at me with a curious smile-on-the-face-of-the-tiger sort of expression. There was no mistaking the fact that he had seen what I had done. I had to say something.

‘Oh, guard,’ I said sweetly, ‘do you think I shall be quite safe travelling in this carriage all alone?’

‘But you won’t be alone, miss, there’s two other ladies coming in here,’ he replied, still with that same amused smile. He really was rather a nice-looking guard.

‘Oh no, there isn’t,’ I said, smiling back at him. ‘See, there’s no other berth reserved except mine.’

‘That’s strange,’ he said, putting his head in at the window and looking round; ‘I’d swear I put three names in here.’

He brought out a plan from his pocket and consulted it. I looked at that plan as a prisoner must look at a witness who is giving incriminating evidence against him.

‘Yes,’ he said, reading out the names. ‘Mrs. and Miss Cardew. I thought so.’

We looked at one another for the fraction of a second.

‘I must have forgotten to put their names up,’ he said smiling. ‘I’ll go and fetch some more cards.’

He was actually moving away.

‘Guard,’ I called in my sweetest voice. Then I drew back. Ermyntrode was stolidly making

my bed on the further lower berth. Lady Manifold and Marjory had gone to book their own berths for their own departure on the morrow. What could one say to a guard to induce him to neglect his duty? Of course at home I should have given him a tip, but somehow in India every white man seems to be such a superior being that I didn't like to offer him even a ten rupee note. Besides, this particular guard was so smart and nice-looking. What could I say?

Fortunately just then Lady Manifold bustled up.

'I hope you are all right?' she said.

'Yes,' I answered, 'isn't it delightful? I've got a carriage all to myself, and the guard'—with my sweetest smile in his direction—'has promised to see that I have it to myself all the way to Bandalpur Junction, where I have to change.'

That guard was really nice-looking, and especially so when he smiled as he did then.

'I'll do my best, miss,' he said, as he touched his hat and went off. I smiled upon him, and felt sure that if that guard had any influence on board that train I had got the carriage to myself just as far as ever I wanted it. I've always had a great belief in the power of a smile well placed.

Bombay station is a very fine affair, but it's about the hottest place I think I've ever been in. It made Lady Manifold feel apoplectic, so I said good-bye and sent her off back to the hotel before the train started. Erymntrude shut up the *jhimils*, and I proceeded to go to bed. The train wasn't

due to start for another fifteen minutes, but I thought it just as well to go to bed, so that if Mrs. and Miss Cardew did force their way into the carriage I should be all right and could pretend to be asleep. I will say this for an Indian first-class railway carriage that it is a most comfortable affair if you've got it to yourself. But if there are four people in it for the night, and you have to climb up into an upper berth where the ventilation isn't good, you don't feel just overflowing with the milk of human kindness for those who have got the berths below.

'Ermyntrude,' I said, as I made myself comfortable for the night, 'I hope you are all right in the second-class.'

Ermyntrude was disposing of my garments in her usual precise and careful manner. She paused with a stocking in her hand.

'There are three women, miss, and three children in my compartment,' she said impressively, 'and one of them is the fattest woman I have ever seen.'

'Poor thing, how hot she must feel it,' I laughed, as I discarded everything in the way of outer covering except a sheet. 'But you have got your lower berth all right?'

'Yes, miss, but little use it will be,' Ermyntrude sniffed anxiously. I knew that something must be wrong.

'Oh, why not?' I asked cheerfully. 'If you've got the lower berth you can go to bed quite comfortably.'

‘That’s just what I can’t do, miss,’ Ermyntrude replied mysteriously.

I raised myself on my elbow and looked at her.

‘My dear, good Ermyntrude,’ I said, ‘what’s wrong?’

Ermyntrude turned and looked at me reproachfully.

‘Haven’t I told you, miss, that there are three women and three children in that carriage?’

I was puzzled.

‘But I don’t see how that prevents your going to bed.’

Ermyntrude dropped her eyes and positively blushed.

‘It ought not to be allowed, miss, indeed it didn’t. Three children, miss, and the eldest a boy of seven!’

I found out afterwards that Ermyntrude had sat up stiff and erect all night in the corner of the carriage on account of that boy of seven. There’s nothing like privacy, I admit, but when you can’t get it I believe in being just as comfortable as you can without it.

To my great joy the train started with no sign of Mrs. and Miss Cardew. Whether they had not turned up, or whether they had been beguiled by that nice-looking guard into another carriage, I was left to wonder. I settled down comfortably for the night with a sigh of perfect content.

I must have fallen very sound asleep straight away, for I remember nothing more until I woke

up with a nasty, uncanny sort of feeling, to find a vague shadowy form looming close up against me. I jumped up with a cry of alarm and promptly hit my head against the upper berth, which must have been lowered while I slept, but as I fell back I made a grab at the shadowy form and caught hold of something solid. There was a faint squeak from up above, and the thing that I held wriggled horribly. I clung on tighter, only half awake and real scared. Suddenly I realised that it was a leg I had caught on to, but before I could let go the whole thing fell flop down on the floor of the carriage with a shriek like a steam whistle. Out of the darkness from the other side of the carriage came a terrified voice.

‘Martha, oh, Martha, what is it? What has happened?’

I jumped up, almost falling over the heap on the floor, and drew back the green baize from the nearest lamp. Then I saw one of the most comic sights I have ever seen, and in the sudden reaction from the real scare I had had, I sank back on my berth laughing hysterically, and feeling as if I should never stop. On the floor crouched a mass of grey dressing-gown with a terrified wrinkled face peeping out of it, surmounted by a grey woollen nightcap, while huddled up on the two opposite berths were two exact counterparts of the figure on the floor. At first I thought I must be dreaming and that they couldn’t be real. They looked perfectly uncanny, and they were gazing at me with sort of bulgy eyes like that kitmatgar servant

in the Bombay hotel when he caught me fast asleep. But it was downright fear that made these old ladies' eyes bulgy. I sat on still and laughed. I must have caught this poor inoffensive, old lady by the leg as she was climbing laboriously into the upper berth. And now they all three sat looking at me with fear showing every moment stronger in their eyes. I am afraid they must have begun to think me mad, but the whole thing was so comic and unexpected that only pity for their helplessness and obvious fright at last conquered my amusement. I stopped laughing, duly apologised, and proceeded to help the mass of grey dressing-gown off the floor into the upper berth. It's a nasty climb for an unathletic old lady into the upper berth of an Indian railway carriage, but it's quite funny from the spectator's point of view, and the sight of a skinny leg dangling down just in the place where I had caught hold of it a few minutes before nearly upset my gravity again. But with great self control I outwardly preserved a sympathetic air, and by gently pushing and shoving the grey dressing gown in various places finally landed it safely in the upper berth. All three old ladies were profuse in their acknowledgments as I once more lowered the green baize over the lights, and bidding them good-night, again composed myself to sleep.

My first thought when I awoke was of Aunt Agatha's woollen things peacefully reposing at the bottom of my biggest trunk labelled 'Not wanted on voyage.' To my intense surprise and disgust

it was bitterly cold, and I positively shivered under a good thick rug, and thought with regret even of the heat of Bombay station. It made me feel particularly annoyed with Lord Hendley too. Is there anything more annoying than a man who tells you something that you don't believe at the time but that comes true afterwards? He had told me that it would be cold, and I had only smiled. Now it would have been Lord Hendley's turn to smile if he could have seen me huddled up in a cotton night-dress, seeking all the warmth that a sheet and a rug could give. Of course, he would have been much too well-bred to have said 'I told you so,' but I don't think even he could have helped looking it. And if there is one thing that drives a woman wild it's the knowledge that she's given a man the chance of saying, 'I told you so,' even if he doesn't say it.

I felt warmer after Ermyntrude had brought me some tea. Ermyntrude looked worn and tired but very faithful, with the grim resigned sort of look about the corners of her mouth that I knew so well. I know better than to start a conversation when Ermyntrude looks like that, so I took my tea with a grateful word and smile, and let her retire again to the unknown terrors of the second-class. Then I thought it time to begin to make friends with the three old ladies, who had just begun to get up. I made no reference at all to the previous night, and we were soon on the most amiable terms. They bore no resentment evidently for the fright I had given them, and only seemed too anxious to

make friends. The best way to do this, they appeared to think, was to agree with everything I said. Now, in most people, that would have annoyed me straight away, but these dear old ladies were so harmless and anxious to please that one couldn't be annoyed. If there is one thing that's irritating, it's people agreeing with whatever one says. I don't want anyone to argue with me. That annoys me even more. But I do like people to have minds of their own. I like to hear their views on subjects. I've an open sort of mind myself, always ready to learn, and I'm not above storing up someone else's epigrams for future use. But you can't learn much from an echo. It's very pleasant for a time, but it isn't exactly instructive, and it soon gets badly on the nerves.

At first, I think, those quaint old ladies still imagined I was mad. But after I had behaved quite properly and sanely for an hour or so in spite of an almost irresistible desire to laugh at them, they got more easy in their minds. If you want to make people quite sure that you are sane and respectable, be dull and solemn—especially dull. Never by any chance say anything witty or original. An Englishman doesn't understand, and gets suspicious of anything of that kind right away. He'll eye you askance at once as an eccentric sort of Johnny, if he doesn't call you mad outright. But if you are very dull, and never say anything that he might not have said himself, then he'll pass you as all right. I suppose it is that nothing

annoys an Englishman more than to find anybody who can say cleverer things than he can himself. If you want to impress an Englishman, be dull and respectable, and don't show that you are clever or light-hearted whatever you do. Though there's an epigram or something real witty on the tip of your tongue, hold on, and don't let go. If you do you're bound to become an object of suspicion straight away in the average Englishman's mind, and days of dull respectability won't quite wipe out that first fatal suspicion.

So I was just as dull and solemn before those dear old ladies as I could possibly be. I didn't even laugh when they told me they had brought out enough water in casks to last them all the time they were in India, because they had heard that the water out there was always full of microbes.

'We're so afraid of cholera,' said one.

'And enteric,' said another.

'And hermataphrosis,' said the third.

'Great heavens!' I exclaimed. 'What's that?'

The third old lady positively blushed.

'It's very dreadful,' she murmured, in such a shy way that I felt it would be positively indecent to pursue the subject further.

'You are carrying enough drinking water along with you to last the whole trip!' I said in amazement. If my eyes had grown bulgy at the doings of these old ladies there might have been some excuse.

'Yes, and most of our food as well,' said the one who was called Martha.

Then Jane took up the tale.

'We had six casks of water when we landed at Bombay, and from there we distributed them all over our line of route, which we had carefully planned before we set out. One we have with us on this train, one has gone to Calcutta, one to Lucknow, one to Jeypore, and one to Mehernugger, and we've allowed ourselves one for the Delhi Durbar. We've calculated to such a nicety what we drink every day that we can't possibly run short.'

'Unless, of course, Providence intervenes, dear Jane,' said Martha.

'Or the casks leak,' I murmured.

Consternation wrote itself large on the face of each.

'Oh, Heaven forbid,' they chimed in chorus, and passed on to another subject, as if that were too awful a catastrophe to contemplate.

'And we need eat very little of the food of this country, for we've brought a large supply in tins,' said the third one, whom they called Anne.

'With, of course, plenty of condensed milk,' added Martha.

'In fact,' said Jane primly, 'you might say that we are absolutely self-provided, and we hope to eat as little as possible beyond what we have brought out from home, and of course, on no account shall we drink anything except from our own casks.'

'And, of course, we shall avoid all native fruit,' added Martha.

‘Which we have always heard is the source of so much disease,’ echoed Anne.

‘Good gracious!’ I exclaimed—if my eyes weren’t bulgy, they might well have been—‘why on earth did you come if you feel like that?’

A look of great but shy affection that went straight to my heart passed over the faces of all three old ladies.

‘We have a nephew,’ they said in unison.

‘At Mehernugger,’ added Martha.

‘A civilian,’ smiled Jane.

‘Whom we haven’t seen for five years,’ murmured Jane shyly, her face alight with a look of expectation.

I felt right down sorry for those three aunts and that nephew straight away. For which I ought to be the more sorry I couldn’t tell. That much depended on what like the nephew was. Supposing he was a smart, up-to-date, go-ahead good all-round sort of man, what use could he have in Mehernugger for three old frumps like these, however much he might have loved them in his youth in their own home? Perhaps they had lived in some charming old-fashioned Manor House, where they fitted into the quaint, time-worn setting like some old picture into its age-dimmed frame, where everybody knew them and loved them, and where their dowdiness and their little peculiarities had always been accepted and forgotten. But why—oh, why, hadn’t they stayed in that charming old Manor House? Any nephew might have continued to like them there, but in Mehernugger! No man likes owning up to dowdy relatives, and

India has no use for frumpy old maids. My heart went out to that nephew. And yet supposing he proved a snob and let his aunts see what he felt. Supposing he hurt these dear old ladies by his rudeness and indifference; supposing they, who had come all this way, looking forward to seeing him, were destined to make the long journey home again, sad at heart and disillusioned.

‘He doesn’t know that we are coming,’ said Martha, nodding at me with a mysterious, delighted smile.

‘We thought we would give him a surprise,’ chirped Jane.

‘He has so often suggested our coming, but I don’t think he ever really thought that we should come,’ smiled Anne, troubled by no shadow of a doubt as to the welcome they would receive.

Young men of India, however much you want to flatter your aged female relatives, don’t ask them to come out and pay you a visit, or, improbable as it may seem, they may take you at your word. My sympathies now went quite over to that nephew in Mehernugger. Just imagine an unfortunate young man having three aunts sprung upon him suddenly like that in India. What on earth could he do with them?

‘You see, he couldn’t get the leave he expected this year,’ Martha was saying.

‘So, as he could not come to see us, we determined that we would come to see him,’ added Jane.

‘Only to think that it’s five years he has been

away from us,' sighed Anne, 'and it had never been as many months before.'

I suddenly felt that that nephew must have warning both for his own sake and that of the poor old ladies, for I don't think that any nephew, however much he loved them, could quite control his expression at such a sudden and unexpected event as the arrival of three frumpy maiden aunts in Mehernugger. I made up my mind at once. I would send him a wire from Bandalpur Junction. I suppose it was really an unwarrantable interference with other people's affairs, but I felt I couldn't just let those three aunts and that nephew clash straight away without some warning.

At Bandalpur Junction Ermyntrude and I disembarked to catch the train for Slumpanugger, and I bade the old ladies an affectionate farewell. They had quite forgotten that they had thought me mad the night before and did so hope we should meet again. They even said that I must come to see them at home, and presented me with their cards, whereupon I discovered they were Ladies—real Ladies as Ermyntrude would call them, that is, entitled to wear the appellation before their Christian names. Of course, that might make a difference, but it couldn't altogether equalise matters, and I determined on that telegram all the same. So we parted, saying we should be sure to meet at Delhi. Nobody could possibly miss them, even in the densest crowd if they kept together, and looked anything like they did then. The last I saw of them they were opening out a well-filled tiffin-

basket and lighting a neat little travelling-stove, preparatory to making tea with their English water and condensed milk.

I left Ermyntrude seated on my biggest trunk, daintily pulling up her skirts out of the way of a crowd of disreputable-looking coolies waiting for the job of putting the luggage into the Slumpanugger train, and went off to send that telegram. The aunts had talked of nothing but their nephew and their plans all day so there was no difficulty that way.

'Aunt Martha, Aunt Jane, and Aunt Anne arriving Allahabad to-morrow,' I wrote, 'and Mehernugger on Monday.'

I guessed that would give him a bit of a shock. The only fear was that he might think it a joke, and take no notice of it. Anyway, I couldn't help it. The only difficulty was, what should I sign it? I've such a contempt for anonymous people, so I felt I must put something. Yet to put my own name didn't seem quite right and proper. Suddenly I had an inspiration. Ermyntrude should sign it. I went over to her at once.

'Will you please sign this, Ermyntrude?' I asked, giving her the form.

She read it carefully through from beginning to end. Ermyntrude is eminently cautious.

'I suppose it's all right, miss,' she asked doubtfully, as she signed it. 'It won't bring me within the arm of the law?'

'No, it won't bring you within the arm of the law, I 'said mock-seriously. Ermyntrude always

roused in me the spirit of mischief. 'But, of course, it may bring you within some other arm, you never can tell, you know,' I added.

Ermyntrude, in the full consciousness of never having been encircled by an arm in the whole of her life, looked up horror-struck.

Then, fortunately, the train came in, and Ermyntrude, unconsciously protected by the arm of the law in the shape of a railway constable, fought her way through to a second-class carriage.

CHAPTER VIII

BERENGARIA

BANDALPUR JUNCTION is a wonderful sight when its many platforms are crowded with a native throng as they were when I first saw them. The women with their bright red and blue saris and jingling ornaments, carrying their bundles on their heads, and moving with typical eastern grace ; the children undismayed by the noise and bustle—a dot of three or four struggling along with a mite a few months old astride across her hips, while their like in age in the West are still with the nurse and the perambulator ; and the men more soberly clad in white—which is often brown with dirt—but picturesque, with trim and curled black beards or clean-cut, clean-shaven faces and deep brown eyes—all made up a continually changing scene like some kaleidoscope of ever-moving colours. It was all rather odoriferous, though one soon got used to that. But don't wear a skirt with a train on an Indian railway-platform. The native has a habit of arriving hours before his train is timed to start, and camping out upon the platform with all his

household goods and chattels. And when a native camps out it isn't very clean just round about there for some time afterwards.

We reached Slumpanugger without any further adventures, though Ermyntrude of course found much to disapprove of. What she complained about most bitterly was the way they rushed her through her meals. Now the gods have seen fit to endow Ermyntrude with a sound and healthy appetite and unsound teeth. It's a bad combination at the best of times, but when you're pressed for time it's doubly to be regretted. If you don't happen to be blessed with a dining-car on board the train—which you only seem to be on the main lines on the express trains in India—you have to get out and gobble what you can in the briefest space of time in a wayside station refreshment-room. But as every train in India is invariably late, and they don't seem to feed the guard and driver at the same places they feed you at, you generally get whisked away long before you've worked through the menu. So Ermyntrude, who eats slowly and was always served last, fared almost as badly as the fox at the stork's dinner-party. The crowning injury was that she never reached the curry stage once throughout the journey.

'And I'd taken such a fancy to the curry, miss,' she said pathetically, as we were whisked away from the last refreshment-room by an excited guard just as the curry appeared.

'Well, never mind,' I replied consolingly, 'you'll get plenty of it during the next few months.'

But Ermyntrude was always a difficult person to console. She always would see the darkest side of life.

‘Ah, but it isn’t only that, miss,’ she said regretfully. ‘It’s against the grain to think of all those meals you’ve had to pay in full for and that I haven’t half ate.’

As the train drew near to Slumpanugger I began to wonder what Berengaria and her household would be like, and how I should get on with them. I think I’m the kind of person that can get on well with anybody really, but of course sometimes it’s an effort, and I get real bored. The number of Anglo-Indians I had come across previously had not been large, and I felt I was about to enter into pastures new. Berengaria’s husband I had never seen, and Berengaria herself, though I had known her fairly well ages ago, I had only seen once since her marriage years before.

She was waiting for me on the platform as the train drew up into Slumpanugger station. Fortunately it was obvious that it must be Berengaria, for I confess right away that I couldn’t have picked her out in a crowd. She seemed to have grown bigger in every way, and her first words told me she was anxious about it.

‘Why, you haven’t changed a bit, dear,’ she said, kissing me effusively. ‘Have I?’

I looked her in the face, and lied boldly. It is no good falling out with your hostess on the station platform as soon as you arrive.

‘No, dear, not a bit,’ I said, returning her kisses

as effusively in order to hide the amusement in my eyes. 'It's marvellous to me how you have stood the climate.'

Berengaria simpered and looked frightfully pleased, and I knew I had made a good impression straight away. But inwardly I trembled to think to what further depths my veracity might still have to descend.

A chaprassi—a gorgeous blaze of red and gold—took charge of Ermyntrude and our belongings, and Berengaria and I mounted the smart tum-tum she had brought to fetch me, and drove away. The last I saw of Ermyntrude she was eyeing doubtfully the tonga, drawn by two huge bullocks, in which she and the luggage were to make the journey to the house.

'It's a five-mile drive,' said Berengaria as we started off, 'but this pony does it in just over half an hour.'

Now I'm not at all a nervous sort of person in dog-carts generally, but during that five-mile drive I kept getting sort of flashes of my past life like a drowning man. Berengaria's driving just beat hollow anything I've ever seen in that line before or since. She dangled the reins quite loose, talked volubly all the time, and paid no attention to the pony whatsoever. It was purely due to the good nature and consideration of that pony that we reached our destination without mishap. That road seemed just about designed to give you a spill if it possibly could. It ran for the most part along a high embankment, quite narrow, with a good

deep drop on either side, and for the fact that we didn't go down it no thanks are due to Berengaria. Now although I own up to getting a bit of a fright sometimes, I always make a point of not showing it. It's so 'Arry and 'Arriet like to squeak. So I clung on to the handrail of that tum-tum, and got my feet free to jump if necessary, and interspersed Berengaria's conversation with 'Yes' and 'No,' 'Did you?' and 'Really' whenever it seemed necessary. But when the pony finally got its tail over the left rein, and the road narrowed with a good twenty-foot drop on my side, and Berengaria went on talking volubly and took no notice whatever, I felt it wouldn't be just right to go silent without a protest to a real right-down smash-up at the bottom of that embankment.

'Berengaria,' I said in as quiet and even a voice as I could, 'don't you think it would be as well to take the reins from under the pony's tail?'

'Oh, that's all right, this pony knows me,' said Berengaria, pausing for a moment in her flow of gossip and then starting off again full tilt. 'And as I was just telling you, the long feud between Mrs. Binks and Mrs. Hicks reached its climax on the *chaboutra* at the club last night. They had both been playing badminton, and I notice that that's always bad for people's tempers. Mrs. Hicks came out on to the *chaboutra* flushed and angry, Mrs. Binks followed flushed but triumphant. I saw that there was electricity in the air, but I never thought it would be as bad as it turned

out to be. I was just going to say something to try and smooth things over when that stupid little Miss Proudfoot went and said the very worst thing she possibly could have said. "Well, who won?" she asked. It's always such a mistake to ask who won a game when you know one side must have lost, and that nobody likes losing. But Miss Proudfoot never has tact. Well, the consequences were fatal, and there was a row. Mrs. Hicks finally accused Mrs. Binks of cheating, and Mrs. Binks called Mrs. Hicks a ——'

'Dear Berengaria,' I interrupted breathlessly, as the pony swerved and almost landed us over the edge of the bank, 'I really do think the pony would be more comfortable if you took the reins from underneath his tail.'

Berengaria leaned forward and viciously drew the reins free. The pony gave a playful kick, and began to canter.

'You never need be nervous with me driving,' said Berengaria, obviously annoyed at being interrupted in the midst of the interesting story of Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Binks. 'I don't pretend to be able to do many things, but I can drive.'

I gasped, and clung on tighter. Why is it that we always imagine we do best the very thing that we do worst? Nothing about Berengaria surely could be worse than her driving, yet that was the very thing I found out afterwards that she particularly prided herself upon. I guess it's a way we poor deluded mortals have. We all of us have our little

weaknesses, and imagine we can do something quite well that we can't do a bit. The things we have and the things we really can do we don't half value, but some pet hobby that Nature never adapted us for we run for all we're worth. Who hasn't come across the otherwise sane and really gifted individual who has deluded himself into the belief that he can sing? or the really clever man who in lighter vein talks drivel, and fondly imagines that it's wit? If only we could see ourselves as others see us! Yet the world would lose half its humour if we hadn't our neighbours' little idiosyncrasies to provide our mirth. So things are doubtless best as they are.

All this time Berengaria was babbling on pleasantly about the ways and doings of station life. She had taken the reins from under the pony's tail, but they really might almost as well have been left there for all the use she made of them. We were approaching a village, and the road narrowed. How we avoided running over innumerable little brown children who ran from their play in the middle of the road shrieking with laughter only just in time, Providence only knows. Through a cloud of dust past a string of heavily-laden bullock-carts we dashed at reckless speed, just shaving the wheels and the bullocks' horns. Old men and older women seemed deaf to the noise of our approach, and only escaped from under the pony's nose at the latest possible minute. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I kept from shouting at them. Berengaria sat sublimely indifferent. They might

have been flies for all the notice that she took of them. One old hag with a scream of fright dropped the bundle from her head and only escaped the wheel by a miracle, while the tum-tum bumped over the bundle. Fowls and goats innumerable flew in all directions, and all by good luck escaped alive, though if they didn't have glimpses of their past lives flash up before them then they never will. It was the kind of drive one sees in children's picture-books, and I saw again from another point of view John Gilpin's mad career.

It was a charming stretch of country through which we passed when I could take my eyes from the fascination of Berengaria's driving to glance around. All up hill and down dale with here and there a level patch, the fields cut out and banked up one above the other tier on tier like seats in some vast amphitheatre, it was a panorama of ever-changing beauty. The reapers were at work amongst the paddy, women as well as men bent double reaping with short sickles, standing often ankle deep in the water and mud of their fields that still remained a grateful legacy of the recent rains. It was just about as unlike an English harvesting as it could be. There was no sign of a hedge anywhere. Only little mounds of earth, grass-grown, a brilliant hue of green, divided the fields, which were so tiny that one could have crossed many of them in a dozen steps. On the higher fields, from which the water had quickly drained, the paddy had been already cut and gathered in. It was only in the hollows where the moisture remained long after the

rains had passed, and where the crop grew to its finest and its best, that the harvesting was still in progress.

We arrived safely at the house at last, the pony swinging in at the gate in one last spurt of playful recklessness. It was a long low bungalow, with a splendid veranda running its full length, filled with a magnificent collection of palms and ferns, and an assortment of long wicker chairs and a couple of hammocks that promised everything possible in the way of ease and comfort. Two more gorgeous chaprassis in red and gold added the necessary touch of colour as they hurried out to meet us, salaaming respectfully. In front there was a charming garden ablaze with English flowers, the lawns green and smooth and well-kept, reminding one of home more than anything I had yet seen in Slump-nugger.

Berengaria's husband came out to welcome us. Now, although he is my cousin by marriage, I can't say that he is the kind of man one takes to straight away. My first thought as he helped me out of the tum-tum was, 'Why on earth did Berengaria marry him?' My second thought, as we shook hand, was, 'Having married him, why on earth doesn't she brush him up a bit, and make the best of him?' He had that sort of look as if he had slept all night in his clothes, and the hopeless kind of hair that always will persist in sticking up in the wrong places and never looks well brushed. He was short and dark and sallow, and he wore glasses, and a tennis shirt that had lost all sense

of shame and was openly frayed at the edges. In fact, you couldn't have called him a wholesome-looking being, whichever way you looked at him. And as I think I've said before, I've a great weakness for clean wholesome looking people.

I suppose Berengaria's husband had been young once, but I guess he was one of those old young men who never were young. He had done nearly thirty years' service in India, and his chief boast was that he had only been home three times all through. He was something like twenty years older than Berengaria, and again I fell to wondering, as I so often do when I meet a married couple for the first time, why on earth they went and did it.

'John,' said Berengaria, as she went round to feed the pony with a piece of sugar cane that one of the gorgeous red and gold chaprassis had produced, 'this is Nicola's first glimpse of the Mofussil, so we must make Slumpanugger look its best.'

'I'm afraid you'll find it very quiet here,' John said in a meek little voice, turning to me, 'but as the Mofussil will be quite new to you perhaps you may find it interesting.'

Now, I hadn't the remotest idea what the Mofussil meant, but, of course, I smiled and said I was sure to find it perfectly fascinating. I'm always a bit in doubt as to what to do when I don't know what people are talking about, whether it's best to say right out that you don't know what they mean or just to nod and smile and look as intelli-

gent as you can. You see, there are so many objections to either course. Most people aren't just exactly good at explaining things, and they get sort of annoyed if you keep on pulling them up and asking them what they mean. They take it as a kind of reflection on their intelligibility. It's quite surprising, too, how ignorant most people really are, and what lots of words they use they don't a bit know the meaning of, or, at least, can't explain to anybody else. So if you don't want to annoy your friends don't be of too inquiring a turn of mind. But, on the other hand, how can you take an intelligent interest in life and learn things if you don't occasionally become a note of interrogation? I suppose the happy mean in this, as in so many other things, is just to lie low, observe all you can, and then ask a question on the quiet to give you the final clue when there's nobody round about. Now I don't think my best friend could call me curious. I'm just an ordinary intelligent being who likes to know things. So when I arrived in India, being a perfect stranger to the country, I thought I couldn't go far wrong in asking a few questions when I ran up suddenly against something I didn't know anything about. But as I think I mentioned in the case of the Bombay boy, I soon found out that Anglo-Indians have got into the comfortable habit of just accepting things as they are without bothering themselves to ask the why and wherefore, and they expect you to do the same, and they get real annoyed if you won't lie quiet, and begin to nose around.

Yet when I got into the Mofussil, which I soon discovered meant much what we should call the country as opposed to the town, I found everybody sprinkling the conversation with such an array of Hindustani words that I simply had to ask what they meant if I didn't want to be out of things altogether.

'We'll drive down to the club, if you like afterwards,' said Berengaria, as we sat down to tea in the veranda, 'but you won't find it very interesting, I'm afraid, as they are a very "chichi" lot in Slumpanugger just now.'

'"Chichi",' I exclaimed almost involuntarily, 'what's that?'

Berengaria paused with her tea-cup halfway to her lips, and a look of amused surprise upon her face.

'Oh, you'll soon find out,' she laughed indulgently. 'It means that they are very much of this country, and that they have all the vices of both and none of the virtues of either.'

'Oh,' I said, rather wondering what like these strange beings so sweepingly condemned might be. 'But what a strange thing to call them. Do you know what the origin of the word "chichi" is?'

Berengaria's indulgent smile froze. I saw at once that I had made a mistake. Berengaria did not know what the origin of the word 'chichi' was, and Berengaria was one of those people who never like to have to confess that there is anything they don't know.

'"Chichi",' said Berengaria, recovering at once

her usual confidence, 'is a Hindustani word meaning whitey-brown, half black, half white. Let me give you some more tea.'

Berengaria is one of those fortunate beings whose confidence in themselves is supreme, whom nothing ever takes aback. It's a great gift. Now I found out by degrees that there were lots of things that Berengaria knew nothing at all about, yet she never let you guess it at the time. She always had something to say, and whatever she said impressed you. I always did think that cleverness was only the art of hiding ignorance, but I never fully realised it until I met Berengaria. For quite a long time I really believed that 'chichi' did mean whitey-brown. I called all sorts of whitey-brown things 'chichi' in my own mind until one day I made myself a laughing-stock and found out my mistake.

I passed up my cup for more tea.

'Kitmatgar,' called Berengaria, and a boy appeared and disappeared again with the cream jug to get more milk. Now I did want to know why a boy should be called a kitmatgar, but I refrained from asking. I felt sure that Berengaria wouldn't like it. I turned to address Mr. Hugesson-Willoughby.

'My dear Nicola,' said Berengaria, with a charming smile as she handed me my tea, 'you mustn't call him Mr. Hugesson-Willoughby. You must call him John.'

John and I smiled at one another. He blushed and murmured, 'Yes, do.'

‘And you, John,’ I said laughingly, ‘you, of course, must call me Nicola.’

After that we seemed to get on much better somehow. He quite brightened up, and seemed more cheerful. Of course, that may have been owing to the Christian names or it may not. I couldn’t tell straight away. It might be that John was one of those men who shine most in the bosoms of their own families, or again it might be that really at heart, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he was a gay Lothario not unaccustomed to the use of ladies’ Christian names. Then I looked at Berengaria, and the second alternative faded out of sight. It must have been the unaccustomed sound of a lady’s Christian name upon his lips that woke him up.

‘I’ve made a “bundobast” for a picnic to-morrow,’ Berengaria was saying. ‘I thought it would be an excellent way for you to get to know all the people.’

I hadn’t the remotest idea what a ‘bundobast’ was, but I smiled sweetly, and duly murmured words of much gratification.

‘Of course, I shall take you calling to-morrow morning, but we shall probably find everyone “darwaza bandh”,’ she added, pouring herself out more tea. ‘In Slumpanugger nobody is ever visible when you call. You either get “darwaza bandh” or “Ghussal Karte”.’

I was getting a bit dazed, and couldn’t quite follow. I think John guessed.

‘“Ghussal Karte,” you, know means having a

bath,' he said. He looked as if he were saying something dreadfully wicked as he said it.

'But at what hour of the day do people have baths in Slumpanugger?' I asked, feeling that it was just as well to know.

'Just whenever you happen to call,' replied Berengaria, looking as if she had said something rather clever.

'But when do you happen to call?' I persisted, feeling horribly dense, but determined to get at least some definite information somewhere.

'Between twelve and two,' said Berengaria, as she sipped her tea. She was looking at me with an amused smile over the edge of her cup. I felt there was something further I ought to understand. But I didn't.

'What an extraordinary time to have a bath,' I murmured.

John rose to put down my cup.

'But they are not really having baths,' he explained diffidently.

'Then why on earth do they say they are?' I cried, refusing more tea and feeling real puzzled.

'Well, you see, you can't exactly expect to see anyone in a bath,' Berengaria said. John quite blushed.

'Naturally,' I laughed. 'But if they are not really in their baths?'

'It comes to much the same thing if they say they are. You can't persist in seeing them.'

Berengaria was evidently a logician of sorts.

'But don't people want to see you when you call

in Slumpanugger?' I asked surprised, having heard so much of Indian hospitality. To say that you are in a bath in order to avoid seeing people struck me as being so very inhospitable.

Then Berengaria explained.

'It isn't exactly that they don't want to see you,' she said. 'They are probably very curious to do that.' She paused and chose a finger rusk carefully. Berengaria knew the value of an effective pause in imparting information. 'It's that they are not always quite prepared.'

'Oh,' I said, a light suddenly dawning in upon me. I had visions of curl papers and dressing-gowns.

'India is a slack sort of place in that way,' Berengaria went on, 'and it's easy to get slouchy and potter about the house and garden in something that you wouldn't dare be seen in outside.'

'I see,' I said. 'Hence the fiction of the bath to avoid being seen if the visitor is not persistent, or to give one time to change if she is.'

'It's a terrible Indian habit,' discoursed Berengaria, as she drank her third cup of tea. 'You will be surprised. Some really quite nice people who ought to know better seem scarcely ever to be visible in their own homes. I don't believe they trouble to put on anything but a dressing-gown until it's time to go out.'

'How dreadful,' I said. I soon found that Berengaria preferred to do all the talking, just giving you time for an interjection now and then.

‘It’s so rough on their husbands, I always think,’ she went on gaily. ‘No husband likes to see his wife going about in a dressing-gown. It’s a poor sort of compliment to pay him to appear before him like that all day, and then deck one’s self out in one’s best for other people at the club at night. Besides, it’s a thing that grows on one out here. Once get to the dressing-gown stage and you’re lost. You get soft and lazy, and you end by letting everything go. The house goes, the affection of your husband and your children goes, and, worst of all, your figure goes. I know my figure is going,’ added Berengaria quickly, ‘but it isn’t because I’ve got to the dressing-gown stage.’

I longed to ask her why, then, it was, but again I thought I’d better not.

Then I suddenly remembered. It was a beautiful pink silk dressing-gown, lined of course with flannel, that Aunt Agatha had sent by me for Berengaria. How unfortunate that we should have got on to the subject of dressing-gowns in an abusive sort of style straight away. Still, it was such a very fascinating dressing-gown that lay reposing in one of my trunks that I felt it capable of turning any woman’s heart of stone.

‘Now I confess a great weakness for dressing-gowns,’ I put out as a sort of feeler, ‘provided, of course, they are worn at the right time and in the right place.’

But Berengaria was firm.

‘I don’t think there is any right time or right place for such a thing,’ she said.

I felt that things were getting bad. How was I to fulfil Aunt Agatha's trust, and duly present the dressing-gown after that ?

'Oh, but surely,' I said desperately, 'you, too, must have a weakness for a real nice chic one to slip on for a nice cosy talk or read before the fire in your own room just before you go to bed.'

'No,' said Berengaria, 'we don't have fires in our bedrooms here—there aren't any fireplaces—and I never read in my room at night. Besides, John never will——'

But I never heard what John never would. It was John who created the diversion.

'Ah, there is your luggage,' he said, jumping up. 'I'll go and see to it.'

There, coming up the drive, was the tonga. It moved at a snail's pace, the bullocks swaying from side to side with slow, easy-going steps, their mild, plaintive faces seeming to protest against the heavy yoke and the burden that lay behind. Beside the driver, yet as far from him as possible, with the air of an early Christian martyr, sat Ermyntrude almost buried beneath the luggage that seemed tied on with string in every conceivable place all round. Oh, those little bits of string ! Surely nowhere in the world do they play the important parts they do in India. They're quite ubiquitous. Every native seems to carry them in his pocket, and no emergency so great but the little bit of string can meet it. Say you're driving miles from anywhere and the harness breaks. Are you stranded ? Oh, dear no, that sort of thing often happens. Promptly the

syce produces from somewhere concealed about his body the little bit of string, and all is well again. The harness may break once again or even twice upon the homeward way, but that little bit of string gets you home at last. It's the same if you break a shaft or a wheel or a lamp. You never need worry, for the syce is sure to have a little bit of string. I've known people out in India drive regularly to the club every night with a tum-tum and harness that were only kept from a speedy dissolution by those useful little bits of string. Once I had to fall back on a little bit of string for my own personal use. But that's another story.

'What lots of luggage,' said Berengaria, as we watched the tonga slowly approach. 'And what lots of delightful smart clothes I expect you've got inside.'

Berengaria looked my travelling costume up and down appreciatively as if things seen augured well for the things as yet unseen.

'I've given you two big almirahs in your room, so that you'll be able to hang all your dresses up,' she said. 'I expect you'll want to unpack them at once;' and being a woman I knew by that that Berengaria was just dying to see what they were like.

Suddenly my thoughts went back to that dreadful pink dressing-gown. If Berengaria was going to see the unpacking, as I knew she would, it would have to come to light.

'Talking of dressing-gowns,' I said enthusiasti-

cally, 'I've the very sweetest thing you've ever seen.'

'Oh,' said Berengaria, not much interested, 'I never wear them now.'

'In pink,' I said, ignoring her remark, 'a glorious, delicious rose-pink.'

'Rose-pink,' said Berengaria, growing interested in spite of herself. 'It's my favourite colour.'

That was good. I grew more enthusiastic.

'Rose-pink,' I repeated thoughtfully and mendaciously. 'Yes, of course it's just your colour.'

Berengaria looked pleased because, of course, rose-pink is not her colour. Why is it that we all of us long to be told the things that we would like to be true about ourselves, but which we secretly know full well are not?

'All in silk,' I went on, 'with the most delicious ruching all round, and dear little bits of cream lace insertion round the bottom, and lined with the softest and most delicate pink flannel you ever saw.'

If anybody's mouth ever did such a horrid thing as 'water' Berengaria's did then.

'Perhaps I did wrong to abuse dressing-gowns to you as I did,' she said regretfully, watching the tonga disappear round the side of the bungalow, 'but I always make a point of abusing the things I haven't got. It makes one feel so much more comfortable and contented with what one has.'

Berengaria paused. But I knew that confidences were coming, and that my time, though near, was not yet.

‘What with the children and expenses one way and another,’ she went on, ‘I determined last month to try and economise. I looked all round, but I couldn’t really find anywhere to begin. Sugar in one’s tea and all that sort of thing is so very feeble, and, besides, I never take sugar, so I found it hard to think of anything. Well, at last I thought of dressing-gowns and sponges. They are things that are never seen unless you go away to spend the night—which I never do—and it happened at the time that mine were both perfect rags—my sponge and dressing-gown, I mean. My wretched ayah had let the dogs get hold of the sponge, and it was difficult to know afterwards which was the sponge and which were the pieces, and as for the dressing-gown, well, I was only waiting to go down to Calcutta to get a new one. So I took the opportunity to economise. One can get on quite well with a hand-glove and a bath-towel.’

But Berengaria sighed even as she said it, evidently for the lost delights of a sponge and a dressing-gown. I felt quite a glow of satisfaction at having worked her up to a pitch to appreciate Aunt Agatha’s present to the full.

‘How very fortunate,’ I said, ‘that real sweet rose-pink dressing-gown I’ve been describing is yours.’

‘Mine?’ cried Berengaria, delight and incredulity in her voice.

‘Aunt Agatha thought you would like it,’ I said, smiling. ‘She is so great on dressing-gowns herself

that she thinks no present could possibly be more welcome.'

'Welcome,' cried Berengaria ecstatically, 'I'm just pining for it. Do you know,' she added confidentially, 'I don't think I've ever wanted anything so much in my life as I've wanted a sponge and a dressing-gown.'

I privately determined to give Berengaria a sponge for a Christmas present. It would be such a nice cheap present, and there's nothing like the satisfaction of giving people just what they want at the lowest possible cost to one's self.

'Come,' I said, 'let's go and unpack that dressing-gown.'

'You dear,' cried Berengaria. She kissed me effusively, and I felt that I had created a real good impression straight away, and after all there's nothing in life quite equal to a good beginning.

CHAPTER IX

AN ADVENTURE IN THE NIGHT

Now, I admit I'm a bit of a coward sometimes—all women are—but I flatter myself I don't often show it.

'Never make an exhibition of your feelings in public. It's so ill-bred,' I remember was one of Aunt Agatha's copy-book maxims which she used to instil into us when we were young, while mother was away on a platform somewhere nobly sacrificing the education of us three children to the education of the country generally. 'If you don't like a person it's probably as much your fault as the other body's, so there's no need for you to show it. Just smile round on everybody. Life's too short to go and make things unpleasant. In the same way if you're in love or frightened or fingering your last cent in the bottom corner of your pocket, there's no good crying out and making a fuss about it. If you've got to die, you will die, and you may as well do it with a smile and make it as pleasant for other people as you can.'

It's one of the most wonderful things in life

how one's early teaching flashes back upon one at times afterwards. Aunt Agatha always said that nothing ever mattered so much as one's first twelve years, and I believe she was right. Try as you will, you will never get away from the training of them, and the things you were taught to believe, in those early days, you will always cherish a kind of sneaking belief for somewhere in the back of your mind, long after reason tells you they were only ignorant survivals of the middle ages. It is sometimes quite wonderful how Aunt Agatha's well-remembered common-sense maxims come back to me just as if they were spoken in my ear, and keep me from making a fool of myself. I found them most sustaining that first dreadful night in the Indian Mofussil.

We had retired to our rooms early that first evening under Berengaria's roof, as I was naturally supposed to be fairly well tired out after my long journey. It was quite true that I was tired, but I was not sleepy. There's a great difference. I had that tiresome alert sort of feeling one sometimes gets after a long journey when one reaches a strange place, and although one really is just tired out, one knows beforehand that sleep won't come. With me that night it was doubtless partly the journey and partly the strange place, but above all it was that room. I looked round it uneasily as Ermyntrude busied herself making things ready for the night. That room was forty feet long by thirty-four feet wide—I know because Ermyntrude and I measured it next day with a tape—and it had eighteen doors.

I know it sounds impossible, and I don't ask you to believe it if you don't want to, but it's true. Right away in the middle of the room stood a sort of camp bed of the smallest possible dimensions. With its white mosquito curtains carefully tucked in, it stood out like an oasis in the desert. Against the walls, one at each end of the room, were two almirahs, and by the side of the bed was a strip of carpet laid down over the matting that covered the floor, and on the strip of carpet was a tiny tea-table. Then there was a dressing-table with another strip of carpet in front of it, and two wicker chairs. And that was all. Just imagine what that in the way of furniture looked like in a room forty by thirty-four, with eighteen curtainless doors. It looked positively naked and indecent, let alone the creepy, uncanny sort of feeling it gave you when you reflected on the fact that you had to sleep in it. I knew straight away that for any one constituted as I am sleep was not to be expected in a room like that.

Ermyntrude, for a wonder, had nothing to complain of. She had a nice cosy little room somewhere at the other end of the house, and was quite content. I privately determined to detain her with me as long as possible, but, of course, I could never let her see that I was afraid to be left alone. I should never have been able to pour contempt upon her many fears again if I had ever let her see that. So I thought of Aunt Agatha's maxims, and tried to look much braver than I felt.

'May I come in?' said a voice suddenly at one

of the eighteen doors. It gave me a horrible start. It was impossible to be quite sure at which of the eighteen doors it was, but it certainly was not the door that I had come in by. That in itself was creepy. It wasn't exactly what you might call cosy and secluded-like to feel that anybody might spring in upon you any moment through any one of eighteen doors that encircled you all round. I guess it was the most indefensible position that I had ever been in.

A door opened quite in an unexpected place, and Berengaria entered. She was wreathed in smiles and the rose-pink dressing-gown. Ostensibly she came to see that I was all right ; really, of course, to exhibit the rose-pink dressing-gown.

'Send your maid away,' she whispered, 'and let's talk cosy for five minutes.'

The idea of talking cosy in a room like that ! However, we ensconced ourselves on the two wicker chairs, and in a weak moment I dismissed Ermyntrude. It only flashed across me after she had gone that I hadn't the remotest idea where her room was. Afterwards I knew what it felt like to have burned one's boats.

'I hope you like your room,' Berengaria was saying in her usual cheery way. 'You must find it nice and roomy after being so cramped up on board ship and in the train.'

'Yes, isn't it roomy?' I returned pleasantly. I never believe in telling lies unnecessarily, so I took refuge in a plain statement of fact. Nobody could have denied that that room was roomy.

‘And it’s so healthy having so many doors and windows,’ continued Berengaria. ‘That’s one of the great advantages of Indian life—you get so much fresh air.’

I hadn’t considered the eighteen doors from that point of view before, but, of course, it was undeniable that they did let in the air, though some people might have called it a draught, and again I murmured acquiescence.

‘And in case of fire you could hardly fail to make your escape,’ Berengaria chatted on, evidently having made it as much a rule to crack up things she had as to run down things like dressing-gowns and sponges that she didn’t possess.

‘Even in a very bad earthquake you would have an excellent chance,’ she added cheerfully. ‘You would be much more likely to get out of this room with eighteen doors in it than you would out of an ordinary room with only two or three.’

Which, of course, again was true. But talking of earthquakes wasn’t exactly comforting to one in my frame of mind, and as I had privately determined to lock up every door securely before going to bed—if I ever had the courage to go—the fact that there were eighteen of them wouldn’t count much from an-escape-in-an-earthquake point of view.

‘Earthquakes?’ I queried as unconcernedly as I could. ‘You don’t get many of them in Slumpanugger, do you?’

Berengaria seemed to hesitate between a desire to be truthful and at the same time not to rob

Slumpanugger of any sensationalism that might be considered its due.

‘Well, I can’t say that we have many,’ she considered, ‘but what we do have are very severe,’ she added more cheerfully. ‘Only last year there was quite a bad one. It was just before we came, and the unfortunate Brown-Toogoods, who were here then, had an awful time of it. Poor Mr. Brown-Toogood had nerves, and Mrs. Brown-Toogood had three children, and what with the nerves and the children and the earthquake they nearly died. There were huge cracks all over the house, and the whole family spent several nights camped out in the garden in much fear and trembling in a tent in the rains. By the way, there was one tremendous crack all down the side of one of these walls.’ Berengaria jumped up in the animated manner of one going to seek hidden treasure, and walked half-way along the forty feet of floor. Then she searched and found it. ‘Ah, there it is. Do you see? It’s been well patched up, of course; but you can still see the crack right down from the ceiling. They do say that it was so wide a crack that you could see daylight nearly the whole length of it from top to bottom.’

I stood behind Berengaria, peeping up at the signs of the crack, which were still distinctly visible. Now, unfortunately, I’ve been burdened with an imagination, and I saw that wall as it must once have looked, gaping open with the daylight streaming through, and it wasn’t a pleasant thing to see when you’re just going to be left alone in a strange room

at night with a vivid imagination and eighteen doors.

‘But anyway,’ I said, somewhat irrelevantly, but feeling round for a bit of comfort somewhere, ‘anyway, you don’t get ghosts out here, do you?’

‘Not get ghosts!’ exclaimed Berengaria. ‘Why, we’ve got the most celebrated one in the provinces at the dâk bungalow just across the way.’

Berengaria is nothing if not dramatic. She flung open one of the windows on the other side of the room.

‘There it is,’ she said, waving a hand out into the darkness. ‘You can just see it from here.’

‘What, the ghost?’ I exclaimed, peering out nervously.

‘Well, you may if you watch all night,’ laughed Berengaria callously. ‘But it’s only a glimpse of the dâk bungalow you can see just now.’

‘The dâk bungalow!’ I gasped. ‘What’s that?’

Berengaria explained. It’s a public sort of rest-house where you can put up if you’re just passing through, or if you’re an official on inspection, or a stranger to the place. But if you’re a nice kind of stranger, and you’re staying any time, you won’t be left long in the dâk bungalow. Somebody will offer to put you up. It’s only the people whom nobody wants who make long stays in dâk bungalows.

Berengaria was launching herself full into the midst of the story of the ghost. I was too much upset all round to grasp the details intelligently,

but, of course, it had all the usual ingredients of a ghost story. Somebody had died a nasty, sticky death, and not having had an Aunt Agatha to instil nice conventional copy-book maxims into it, had been creating a dreadful fuss about it ever since, and making it just as disagreeable for other people as it could. I shivered as I looked out into the pitchy darkness. Only a horrible patch of white where the dāk bungalow loomed up out of the surrounding gloom scarce a hundred yards away broke the blackness of the night.

Berengaria, having finished the ghost story to her own infinite satisfaction and my discomfiture, closed the window and prepared to depart.

‘Now I really must say good night. I do hope you will sleep well,’ she said cheerfully. ‘There’s a “chowkidar” in the veranda, so you will be quite safe.’

‘A “chowkidar”,’ I asked eagerly, clinging to a last hope, ‘what’s that?’

‘A “chowkidar”,’ said Berengaria slowly, as if she were repeating a lesson as she stood in one of the eighteen doorways, ‘a “chowkidar” is the foundation-stone on which the whole British Constitution in India rests. I got that from John, so it must be true.’ She nodded smilingly. ‘And if you come just here you can distinctly hear him snoring.’

Whether it was the foundation-stone of the British Constitution in India or John that I should hear snoring didn’t seem quite clear. Anyway, I went over and stood by Berengaria. It was quite

dark outside, save for a small hand-lamp that stood on the floor at the further end of the veranda. From what looked like a long bundle of clothes beside it came a deep and sonorous snoring. It was evidently the foundation-stone of the British Constitution in India. I regarded it with some awe.

‘It’s generally very stupid, and it scarcely ever understands what you say to it, and its oftenest asleep,’ laughed Berengaria, as she turned to bid me a final good night, ‘but it’s quite useful in its own way, and you’re quite safe as long as you can hear it snore near by.’

And with a wave of the hand amidst a flutter of rose-pink silk dressing-gown Berengaria disappeared from sight. Nothing but Aunt Agatha’s maxims had kept me from falling on her neck, and imploring her not to leave me.

I stood in the doorway—one of the eighteen—looking at the foundation-stone of the British Constitution in India. I can’t truthfully say that the sight was calculated to inspire one with much confidence, but anyway I felt that it was something to fall back upon as a last resort in case of need. I was congratulating myself on that at least when something happened. I saw a kind of movement coming from somewhere very much inside the bundle. It was like the struggling of a cat in a bag. The snoring ceased. I hid behind the half-open door, and watched breathlessly. I had never yet seen the foundation-stone of the British Constitution in India, and my curiosity was great.

Slowly it unwound itself like a cocoon from among various odd coverings, and struggled to its feet. It looked very dazed and sleepy, and seemed rather top-heavy, and all its movements were deliberate, but of course that was only to be expected of a foundation-stone. First it picked up a blue pug-garee and put it on its head. Then one by one very slowly it gathered up all its other belongings, including a tiny little bolster for its head. Finally, to my speechless amazement, it picked up the lamp and solemnly marched away. It gave me a real depressed extinction-of-the-last-hope sort of feeling straight away. Even the very foundation of the British Constitution in India had gone away and left me.

I stood in that doorway—one of eighteen—feeling right down helpless. Everything was so horribly still. I felt myself straining my ears to catch a sound of any kind, yet knowing all the time that if I did hear one it would be even more awe-inspiring than the silence. Slowly I turned and went inside, and locked the door. There were probably seventeen others still unlocked. The huge room, only dimly lit by a single lamp, seemed to swallow me up. I felt like a very small cutlet in a very big meat-safe. Then I suddenly remembered one of Aunt Agatha's maxims, 'If you are going to die you will die,' with various sorts of exhortations to do it decently. So I tried to buck up. I was in a strange house in a strange land. I didn't know where anybody's rooms were. Even the very foundation-stone of the British Constitution in India

had gone away and left me. There was no help for it. I must face things alone.

Now this may not seem to you such a dreadful contingency as it was to me. Nobody would ever guess from knowing me by day how horribly nervous I am at night. I'm quite brave and ready to face anything in the daytime. Then you can see what's happening, and you do know just where you are. It's the thought of something rushing on you suddenly in the dark when you're alone and can't see what's going on that sort of paralyses me. It's not a feeling that I always have every night. I go on quite happily for a long time. Then I suddenly think about it, and it's all up. I had it that night very badly, and I begin to think now that it must have been presentiment as much as anything besides.

First of all I went carefully round locking every door. Perhaps I should explain that in India a door and a window are generally synonymous terms. You get what we call full-length French windows, generally a glass-door inside with outside venetians—shutters or *jhilmils*, as they call them out in India. I contented myself with bolting the *jhilmils* sometimes, though I had horrible doubts as to whether it might not be possible by carefully inserting one's hand to open them from the outside. But when I came to the eighteenth door I found to my horror that it had no inside glass window and no bolt at all on the *jhilmil*! And it was one of those that looked straight out towards the *dâk* bungalow across the compound—you always in India call

the grounds round your house a compound, though it's no good asking why because nobody will be able to tell you. •

My spirits sank still lower as I looked out into that compound. It was a pitch-dark night, and it didn't cheer me up to think that not even a bolt lay between me and that nasty, lonely, dark place outside. I pulled the jhilmil to, and sat down and looked at it sadly. That eighteenth boltless door was just typical of India all through. Everything may be very nice, but there's always something 'not just quite' about it that mars the general effect. What possible use is there in seventeen doors that lock if the eighteenth one is destitute of bolts and bars? One might just as well have saved the cost of the seventeen bolts on all the others. It's just the same all through. You see a splendid carriage and pair, real good horses, gorgeous harness, men in wonderful liveries, a regular smart turn-out, yet dangling underneath you'll probably find a bundle of grass or that little bit of string again personified in a coil of rope. It's the most comically incongruous sight you've ever seen. But it's a pity, because it spoils the general effect. You couldn't possibly do it anywhere except in India. When Berengaria borrows a Rajah's carriage that ugly coil of rope is always swinging somewhere underneath or in the rear, and I can't get over it. I enjoy the drive and the smartness of the equipage very much, but I'm always subconscious of that incongruous coil of rope. I once asked Berengaria why they carried

it. She had got so used to it as people do get used to things in India, that she seemed quite surprised to see it, and the only guess she ventured on was that they must have brought it along to mend the harness with in case it broke.

And then as I contemplated that eighteenth door that wouldn't lock a brilliant idea struck me. I, too, would use a little bit of string. I began to search my trunks with hope renewed, but soon it began to dawn upon me that that was the one thing that I did not possess. Then it was that I resorted to a bootlace. I remember Aunt Agatha once saying that give a woman a bootlace and a hairpin, and there are few things she can't do. So I carefully tied those jhilmils together with a bootlace. I didn't flatter myself that it was very strong, but even a bootlace was better than nothing between me and that dreadful compound and the dâk bungalow outside. Then I looked timidly into the almirahs, and prodded my dresses to make sure there was nothing inside. Then I lowered the light. I should have liked to keep it on full, but it was such a tiny one that I doubted its capacity to last the whole night through, and to be left in the dark was too awful a possibility to contemplate. Then I crept under the mosquito-net into bed, and tucked myself in.

There was only one consolation about that room. It was quite impossible for anyone to be hiding under that camp-bed.

Now I always have objected to sleeping with my face turned away from the door. Of course that is

easy enough to avoid in an ordinary sensible English room. But what could one do with a room with eighteen doors? As soon as ever I had got into bed I became doubly conscious of those nine doors that I couldn't see. It gave me a dreadful creepy sort of feeling. I imagined one of those unseen doors stealthily opening and someone coming in noiselessly, and I felt certain I should get an awful shock in a moment if I wasn't stabbed from behind or smothered straight away. It's so dreadful to think of people whom you can't see peeping in and seeing you. I felt as if I was shut up in a glass house as a sort of peep-show. I imagined eyes at each of the eighteen doors. I crouched down in bed, and tried to make myself invisible. Then I started up filled with a new fear. I was sure I had lost my bearings, and forgotten which door led where. I peered out looking for the bootlace to guide me, but everything looked dim and shadowy. Was the light burning lower, or was it only my imagination? If anything happened I had a presentiment that I should be paralysed and my limbs refuse to move. My throat was already too much parched to scream. Besides, what noise that one frightened woman might make in the inside of a room like that would have the ghost of a chance of being heard outside. Especially as I had carefully locked every door! How could I have been so foolish as to lock every door! If I had only left them all wide open I might have had eighteen chances of escape. Now I had none. I sat up in bed trying

to see in front, on both sides, and behind at one and the same time. It was very tiring. I felt certain the lamp was going out. It threw such queer shadows. There was one of those dreadful green lizards on the wall just above it, waiting with that deadly still look they have to pounce upon a poor harmless fly just below. How do lizards manage to stand on the wall heads down in the way they do? The very sight of it seemed to fascinate that fly. When he had got wings why didn't he fly away? I took a sudden interest in that fly. I began to feel that I should be rather like it if anything were to happen to me just then. That fly, I guess, was just about as paralysed as I should be if I saw anything huge looming over me. I waited kind of breathless, peering through the mosquito-net. I could see the lizard's throat palpitating in a dreadful sort of way, as if he smacked his lips in anticipation of the coming dainty. I suppose it wasn't really long, but it seemed ages that they stood like that. The fly never moved, and the lizard seemed to gloat over it and prolong its agony. Then it was all over in a flash. It was like a conjuring trick. The lizard was a few inches lower down on the wall, and the fly had disappeared. That was all.

After that I lay down again sadly, and counted sheep going in and out of each of the eighteen doors. If only I could go to sleep and not wake up till it was light! How horribly still it was! But I went on steadily counting sheep. I had twelve of them, and I made them go in and out of every

door all round the room one behind the other. I counted them as they came in at the door tied up with the bootlace. When they had all got through, I multiplied by eighteen before they had time to get round again. It was very difficult multiplying by eighteen, and the last thing I remember was thinking how much easier it would have been if only there had been twenty doors instead of eighteen.

‘Oo-ugh, oo-ugh, oo-ugh!’ I woke from a beautiful dreamless sleep with a start. ‘Oo-ugh, oo-ugh, oo-ugh!’ There was no mistaking it. There was something in the room. It was close by the bed. It was leering at me with its dreadful half human face through the mosquito nets. Its eyes weren’t bulgy, but they were horribly wide open, and they had the kind of anticipatory gleam about them that the lizard’s had when it looked down upon the fly. I knew that it would happen. I was absolutely paralysed. After that first start, which brought me to a half-sitting posture, I seemed fixed. I couldn’t move; as for crying out, I didn’t seem to have a throat at all. I and that baboon or gorilla, or whatever it was, faced one another with only the mosquito curtain in between.

Whether that baboon liked the look of me or not I can’t say, but it seemed hours that he stood still and looked at me. He was quite silent now, and he put his hand—or should I call it a foot or a paw?—up to his chin, as if he were seriously considering me. It was real human. He had

long grey hair and a pale, lined face, that was fearfully old and knowing and ugly, that reminded me of—but perhaps I had better not say whom, though you are sure to guess. How big he was I won't say either, because, as I said before, I've got a vivid imagination, and I don't feel that I could survive a real good cross examination on the events of that dreadful night.

I think he must have decided at last that he did like me as, suddenly, without any warning, he gave an awful whoop that made me nearly jump out of my skin, and then began waltzing round and round the bed waving his arms. I fell back, and put my head under the bedclothes. But that was worse. I felt I positively must see what he was doing. I peeped out. He was still waltzing round and round, and the uncanny thing was that he made no sound except an occasional whoop that made my blood run cold. His feet seemed to fall almost noiselessly on the floor, though he gave great leaps and bounds. Awful stories of baboons came back to me. One particularly dreadful one of Edgar Allan Poe's, dimly remembered before, stood out with terrible distinctness now. I wondered if he knew how flimsy was the mosquito net that was all there was between us. Fortunately, though once or twice he came up quite close to it and peered through at me, he never tried to touch it.

I began to get more confidence as the dance went on and nothing happened. Several of Aunt Agatha's maxims recurred to me. After all, this

might not be a criminal baboon like Edgar Allan Poe's. It might only have come to pay me a visit, and found me at home instead of 'Ghussal Karte.' But of course this was only a chance, and it struck me as being so very ignominious to be killed by a baboon, and I don't think one would look at all nice afterwards. 'Make things as pleasant as you can for other people,' was one of Aunt Agatha's chief maxims. Well, I shouldn't be making it exactly pleasant for Berengaria and John if I went and died a nasty sticky death in their house the very first night. So it behoved me for everybody's sake as well as for my own to outwit that baboon.

Presently the circuit he was making round and round my bed grew wider, until at last he caught sight of himself in the looking glass that stood on the dressing table against the wall. He stopped at once, evidently very much interested. Very cautiously he approached and surveyed himself. He didn't take his presentment for another baboon, as I thought he would—as a dog or a cat generally does. He seemed quite to understand that it was himself he was looking at, and quite anxious about his personal appearance. His movements were all so grotesquely human that I was perfectly fascinated and almost forgot to be afraid any more. He put up his hand and smoothed his hair; he looked at his teeth, and made quaint faces at himself, giving vent to strange gurgling noises like a pleased infant. He seemed to have forgotten all about me.

Now was my time to escape if I could only manage it. The question was whether I could reach one of the eighteen doors, unlock it, and get away outside without his seeing me. I made up my mind to risk it. With one eye on the baboon I began to work my way cautiously and silently under the mosquito curtains out of bed. That was my undoing. It's a bit of an art until you understand the thing well to get out quickly and neatly from under a mosquito net that has been carefully tucked in. I had got both my feet outside all right, and was just going to duck my head to scramble through when that wretched baboon looked round. He came dancing towards me at once with a dreadful whoop that brought back all my fears straight away. I was half in and half out of bed, and as I scrambled back I got horribly mixed up in the mosquito net. The more frantic the efforts I made to get inside it the more I seemed to be outside, and by the time the baboon got round the bed I was quite inextricably muddled up. There was one leg I could not get inside anyhow, and a last despairing effort brought half the mosquito net down. A nasty cold damp hand placed suddenly on my knee finished me off. I don't remember anything more.

Now I have never fainted before or since in my life, but I suppose I must have done so then. The next thing I was conscious of was opening my eyes, and seeing Ermyntrude looking down at me with a look of horror and solicitude never previously attained even on her expressive countenance. And

it was not surprising under the circumstances, for—I was lying under the bed. How I came there remains a mystery to this day. Whether the baboon put me there or whether I put myself there I suppose I shall never know. The baboon may know, but my one consolation is that the baboon won't tell. If only one could be as certain of the discretion of one's friends!

'Oh, miss,' Ermyntrude was gasping out, her hand, as usual in moments of excitement, wildly endeavouring to place itself upon her heart, 'oh, miss, what 'ave 'appened to you?'

The morning sunlight was streaming full into the room. The terrors of the night were passed. I felt quite brave in spirit again though most uncomfortably weak physically.

'My good Ermyntrude,' I said, getting out from underneath the bed with what dignity I could, 'if I choose from hygienic principles to sleep beneath the bed instead of upon it have you any objection?'

'Oh no, miss, none whatsoever,' exclaimed Ermyntrude hastily. A little sarcasm always has a wonderful effect on Ermyntrude.

But of course I couldn't expect to satisfy her perfectly natural curiosity as easily as that. She was still standing looking at me with a horrified expression. Suddenly I paused, arrested by a horrible thought. What could it be that she was staring at? Marie Antoinette and the prisoner of Chillon flashed across my memory. Could it—could it possibly be that I too had gone white

with fright in a single night? My mind was already busy trying to remember the names of all the patent hair-washes I had always hitherto read of with such scorn. I tried to move towards the looking-glass, but my knees seemed to fail me. I turned, and looked Ermyntrude straight in the eyes.

‘Ermyntrude,’ I said solemnly, ‘what colour do you call my hair?’

Ermyntrude backed perceptibly. I think she thought that I was mad.

‘Oh, a beautiful golden brown, miss, as it always was, and I hope always will be,’ she exclaimed hastily and propitiatingly.

‘Ermyntrude,’ I said, with a sigh of infinite relief, ‘you shall have that pale-blue muslin to send home to your sister Beatrice as soon as ever I have worn it twice more.’

That seemed to restore Ermyntrude’s faith in my sanity, and she evidently gave up the idea of madness at once. I went over to the looking-glass while she expressed her gratitude.

‘But, oh, you do look pale, miss,’ she said a moment later, her curiosity evidently reviving.

I not only looked pale as I surveyed myself critically in the glass but I felt pale, which is even worse. Yet I was not going to let Ermyntrude know it or she would be sure to fuss—nothing annoys me more than being fussed over when I’m not well—and bring out all Aunt Agatha’s remedies, which were not at all what I wanted. There was only one thing that would do me any good, and

that one thing was brandy, which, of course, being the one thing needful, was not included in Aunt Agatha's remedies. I felt that it was necessary to stifle Ermyntrude's curiosity once and for all.

'Ermyntrude,' I said slowly and expressively, and thinking what Bucklew in the 'Bride of Lammermoor' said to his friends after he too had had an adventure in the night, 'you found me under the bed when you came in this morning, and it's no good pretending the mosquito-net is not torn. I'm not going to tell you anything more as to how I came to be under the bed. You may accept the fact as due to a little eccentricity of mine, or as anything else you like, but I forbid you to mention it to anyone here.'

I'm afraid really that that only made Ermyntrude more curious still, but of course she had nothing more to say. I was determined at all costs that my adventure should not be known. I would not become a laughing-stock as the girl whose first visitor in Slumpanugger was a baboon.

I drank my tea in silence and great dignity, while Ermyntrude busied herself about the room. I still felt a little weak, but quite brave again. I suppose I must have an extraordinary constitution. Or is it quite a usual one? I've never known myself anything but brave by day, whereas by night—well you have heard.

'That's very strange,' I heard Ermyntrude murmur, searching all round the bare expanse of floor, on the other chair, on my trunks, and

even in the almirahs. Then I saw that she held one of my black silk evening stockings in her hand. I paused with the cup of tea half way to my lips. Something dreadful was dawning upon me.

‘There was one of your black silk stockings on this chair, miss,’ Ermyntrude said at last, after much fruitless searching. ‘But the other one is not to be found anywhere.’

I put down my cup of tea. I could not trust my hands to hold it any longer.

‘Ermyntrude,’ I asked hoarsely, ‘was that stocking marked?’

‘Marked, miss?’ queried Ermyntrude, doubts as to my sanity evidently overcoming her again as she looked at me.

‘Yes, marked,’ I said feebly—‘marked with my name or initials?’

Ermyntrude suddenly drew herself up primly.

‘No, miss,’ was all she said, but the variety of expressions that flashed across her face in those few seconds spoke volumes. All at once I realised what dreadful things Ermyntrude’s vivid imagination might be conjuring up about that missing stocking. Partly at that, partly from relief that that stocking wasn’t marked, I lay back and laughed hysterically.

When I recovered I told the horrified Ermyntrude the whole story of the night’s adventures, of course leaving out the parts about my own personal feelings. In the narrative I appeared to have acted with great courage and discretion.

Ermyntrude was thrilled. It was much better and more real than the *Family Herald*.

‘Only remember, Ermyntrude,’ I said, as I finished the recital, ‘I forbid you to mention it to anybody. I know how people gossip in India, and I will not be talked about in connection with a baboon.’

CHAPTER X

I DON MY TOPI AND WE CALL ON PETER

THEN I went and joined Berengaria and John in the veranda, where we had 'chota hazri' as if nothing had happened. In return to Berengaria's inquiries as to whether I had slept well I lied politely. I always think that, because you have had a bad night yourself, there's no need to upset your hostess about it in the morning. Of course, there are people who have such an absurdly exaggerated idea of the truth that they think it necessary to tell it on every possible occasion. But they are very uncomfortable people to live with. Anybody who knows anything of life, and has picked up a little common-sense by the way, knows quite well that the truth is often so dreadfully rude and brutal that it has to be watered down considerably to make things swim at all in ordinary civilised society. Nobody is quite so annoying as the painfully truthful person. Say you're in the midst of a glowing narration of a real exciting incident, what can be more annoying than to be pulled up short by the truthful person because, forsooth, you said it

happened at ten o'clock when probably it happened at half-past, and time wasn't of the essence of the story at all? Yet I know a dreadful truthful person like that at home. She nearly drives Aunt Agatha mad. For, in spite of Aunt Agatha's strong common-sense on most points, she's generally a bit vague as to times and dates and places. So she and that truthful person, whose conscience won't allow her to let any mistake pass without correcting it, don't exactly get on well together. You've got to diverge from the truth consciously or unconsciously some time or other, so you had best just make up your mind to it and not worry. 'Heaven can't be left empty. Some people must be allowed to go there,' as Aunt Agatha puts in it her downright way. 'But if they are going to keep people out for a trifling thing like telling a few fibs, there won't be anybody there at all.' So I always tell my hostess when I come down in the morning that I've slept well, and hope to be forgiven when it isn't true.

'Chota hazri,' I perhaps ought to explain is the 'little breakfast.' It's a kind of sandwich by the way to support you until you get to the real 'hazri' later on.

'Eat a good chota hazri,' Berengaria said, helping me to the homely dish of eggs and bacon, 'as you won't get anything else till eleven o'clock.'

From the plentiful supply of eggs and bacon and cold beef and jam and fruit to which I succumbed, I felt that I could hold out much longer than till eleven o'clock.

‘Now go and get your topi,’ said Berengaria, as we finished, ‘and I will show you round the garden.’

I went off to my room, and got Ermyntrude to unearth the topi I had provided myself with at home. In Bombay and on the journey I had gone about in an ordinary hat under a thick parasol, but since everybody told me I should die soon if I did that any more I felt it was time to adopt that topi. It struck me then as I put it on that it looked rather funny, and not quite like those I had seen about the streets of Bombay, but I concluded that, coming from such a well-known London shop, it must be that mine was only a much superior article to those that I had come across out here. I thought the piece of silk that hung down behind quite elegant in an Early Victorian sort of style.

When I rejoined Berengaria in the veranda, I thought she must be suddenly taken with convulsions.

‘It’s no use my trying not to laugh, Nicola, because I must,’ she cried at last, letting herself go, and laughing till the tears rolled down her cheeks.

I looked at her as one person who doesn’t see the joke always will look at another person who does. Berengaria jumped up and kissed me impulsively.

‘You dear,’ she laughed, ‘you look just like one of the ladies in those old pig-sticking pictures in John’s study.’

Now it requires a very good tempered person indeed to smile when he's being laughed at, especially when he's not quite sure why he's the object of merriment.

'Not having seen the pig-sticking pictures in John's study,' I said as pleasantly as I could, 'I——'

'Oh, my dear,' interrupted Berengaria, still laughing, but recovering herself, 'it's that topi.'

I am afraid it was rather stiffly that I asked what was wrong with that topi.

'Ah, that's one of the things that's so hard to explain,' said Berengaria smilingly. 'Of course, it ought not to have that piece of silk hanging down behind, but beyond that it's difficult to say what's wrong with it except that it is wrong. When you've been out here a little longer you will understand. It isn't that you are bound down to any one shape or style. There are lots of different shapes that you may wear, but there are equally lots of shapes that you can't possibly wear. You'll soon learn to know by instinct, but you can't explain it.'

So the reason of the impossibility of my topi was another of the many things in India one can't expect to get an explanation of.

'Fortunately you can get topis in Slumpanugger,' Berengaria informed me. 'I'll send round for the box-wala to come and bring some up for you to see.'

I didn't ask just then what a 'box-wala' was, because I was too much concerned about my topi,

but I found out afterwards that it's a comprehensive term. It includes anything from the picturesque Cashmiri who goes round from door to door like a pedlar with his silks, his silver work, and his embroidery for sale, up to the merchant prince who lives luxuriously in the capital, but yet makes his money out of trade. But, of course, you must never let him know you call him that. You may call a civilian to his face a 'heaven-born,' and he'll probably think even better of you than he did before, but a box-wala would look coldly at you if you called him that to his face. There are lots of other people you may give other appellations to behind their backs that you may not give them to their faces in India. You call a man a 'coolie-catcher' behind his back, but you must take great care to speak of him as an emigration agent when he's present. Fortunately, in the case of a planter, you may call a spade a spade ; he's not at all ashamed of planting. I suppose, after all, it's much the same everywhere. In the States you call your parson a 'devil-dodger' when he's nowhere round, but that isn't just the name you accost him by when you meet him on the street. Still, I think it's more common in India than anywhere else, and it makes the conversation full of pitfalls. You never know what your *vis-à-vis's* sister or cousin or aunt may be, so you have to tread warily when you happen to be a stranger in the land.

As we strolled about the garden, Berengaria chatted in her own inimitable way about the station generally. I feel I ought to stay to explain the

meaning of the word 'station' as used in India, but if I stop to explain all the strange and new words that interspersed Berengaria's conversation, I shall develop into a sort of encyclopaedia, and never get along at all. When you speak of a station in India, you don't generally mean anything to do with a railway at all. I'm not sure even now if I know just exactly what you do mean. As I said before, everything is a bit vague in India. There are so many things you take for granted and think you quite understand until some tiresome person comes along and asks you to explain them. The station, I think, has now really come to mean the place where any officials have their headquarters. It may mean a lot more, but I certainly think it does mean that.

'There are only about half a dozen houses to call at,' Berengaria was saying. 'We are very short of ladies in the station just now. First, there is Mrs. Ipplethwaite. She takes precedence next to me, but you won't find her very interesting. Somewhere back in the last century one of her ancestors was Governor of Bombay, and she feels it hard luck that she should be in India as anything else. She's married to a dreadful little man, whom, fortunately, one scarcely ever sees. He thinks he's funny when he's only a fool. I can't think why she married him.'

How many of our friends there are of whom we can't think why they did it! I caught myself wondering if Mrs. Ipplethwaite in her turn had ever wondered why Berengaria married John.

‘Then there is Mrs. Hicks.’ Berengaria paused. It was one of those pauses much more effective than words. One knew that Mrs. Hicks had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. ‘I never say anything nasty of anybody if I can help it,’ went on Berengaria slowly, as if she were delivering judgment, ‘but I can’t say anything good of Mrs. Hicks, and as I shall not take you to call upon her it doesn’t matter. She is known as the “Rudest Woman in Asia”.’

Even Berengaria evidently couldn’t resist that last little hit. The ‘Rudest Woman in Asia!’ Of course, I was immediately seized with a desire to meet her. Anyone with sufficient character to acquire such a high sounding, sweeping title as that must be worth meeting.

‘We will call on Mrs. Binks,’ Berengaria decided. ‘I think she really would be quite a nice woman but for Mrs. Hicks. Mrs. Hicks will not leave her alone, and I believe she takes a malicious pleasure in rubbing her up the wrong way.’

‘Are they both quite young?’ I asked. I always like to know the ages of people I am being told about. It helps you to form such a much better conception of what they are like. I don’t see how you can take an interest in a person until you know whether he is young, middle-aged, or old.

‘Nobody is old in India,’ Berengaria’s reply made me feel that I had asked a question that no decent person would ever have asked. ‘And we never admit we are middle-aged. So, of course, they must be quite young.’

Age was evidently one of the things that must not be talked about in India. I made a note of it.

‘Then there is Mrs. Caramont. You’ll like her. She really is young and bright and pretty, and she’s only been out here about a year, so she hasn’t had time to get stale like most of us. And that’s about all the ladies in the station, except Mrs. Proudfoot.’

From Berengaria’s tone it was evident that Mrs. Proudfoot was the kind of person you called to mind last of all, whom you asked to dinner not because you wanted her but simply because she was a human being and counted one, and filled a vacant place. You all know the kind of person that I mean.

‘Poor dear thing,’ said Berengaria kindly. ‘I’m afraid twenty years of Mr. Proudfoot has rather knocked it out of her. But she hasn’t lost her smile, though it has become rather a placid one, and that’s something. Empsey—Miss Proudfoot—is rather like her mother, with the exception that she never had in her what her mother has had knocked out of her, but, of course, it comes to much the same thing in the end. They do say that young de Vere Smith de Vere is going to marry her. But I really think she has got more sense. He’s the young policeman here, you know.’

‘Policeman?’ I repeated, finding it hard to think of a policeman in love with one of Berengaria’s friends.

‘Oh, not a constable or a Bobby,’ laughed

Berengaria. 'He's the assistant District Superintendent of Police, commonly called the Policeman, and generally one of the best all round men in the station. We've had luck just now in having two policemen like that awful old tyrant, Mr. Proudfoot, and a silly little boy like young de Vere Smith de Vere.'

I found out afterwards that both Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere had once upon a time stood high in the estimation of Berengaria. But why should I give her away? We can't love everybody always.

Naturally it was the bachelors I was most interested in. But Berengaria dismissed them summarily.

'Young Mr. Colborne is quite the best of them,' she said in her direct, downright way, that rather condemned all the others. 'He's a good sort, splendid at all sorts of games, very good-looking, and popular with everybody.'

I'm not quite sure that the description of Mr. Colborne altogether prejudiced me in his favour. I'm always doubtful whether I shall like a person who is said to be universally popular. I've a suspicion that he must be weak or thick skinned or a fraud. I've seen such extraordinary specimens who have been popular. I know that being what is commonly known as a good sort goes a long way, and it covers a multitude of shortcomings, but it can't quite cover them all. If anyone, either a man or a woman, has enough in them to make real friends, then it's a dead certainty that they will

make enemies too. It's only the weak sort of people who'll take a snub or anything else that comes along smilingly that will ever be popular all round. If you've got any go or spirit in you, you are bound to offend somebody. Besides, if you're really good for anything you'll make nasty people jealous, and that doesn't tend to make you popular. The universally popular person mustn't have enough in him to make anybody jealous. Of course, if you are a fraud you may manage it. That's the only fault I have to find with Aunt Agatha's maxims. When you don't show people what you really think of them you're deceiving them, though this may be and probably is chiefly for the other people's good, and out of pure consideration for their feelings. So the man who can carry dissimulation to a fine art and never let people know what he's really like, and what a contempt he's got for them, stands a good chance in the race for popularity. Fortunately I've never been troubled with a desire to be popular. Give me a few real good friends, and the others can just take care of themselves.

We breakfasted at eleven, and soon after twelve we started out upon our calls. We went in a victoria with the hood up, so I was able to wear one of my smartest hats. The topi had been already bundled ignominiously out of sight.

'We'll go to Mrs. Binks' first,' said Berengaria, as she gave the order to the coachman.

A few minutes' drive along a dusty road, and we were sitting in a nice cool, well ordered drawing-

room talking to Mrs. Binks. I was rather taken with Mrs. Binks at first sight. She was bright and lively and full of fun, and I could well imagine that she might have been really pretty before the Indian climate played havoc with her complexion.

‘Fifteen hot weathers I have stayed down in the plains,’ she told me cheerfully. ‘Nothing will induce me to leave my husband to struggle on down here all by myself.’

My admiration for Mrs. Binks grew. Fifteen hot weathers in the plains! Of course I didn’t know what a hot weather in the plains really meant, but it sounded dreadful and altogether complexion-destroying. Now no woman resigns herself without a struggle to a cracked and parchy skin. It isn’t in her nature to sit down quietly and watch her colour fading, and the whites of her eyes get yellow, and the horrid little lines grow deeper all over her face. Yet Mrs. Binks had done all this in order to be at hand to comfort and support Mr. Binks through the long, dreary hot weathers. Of course, after all, it’s only what every wife ought to do. What is the use of a wife if she goes and deserts her husband half the year at the most unpleasant time just when he wants cheering up most. I don’t say I shouldn’t do it. I probably should, but I think I should feel a bit mean for the first five minutes after I had left him. So I regarded Mrs. Binks as something of a heroine.

Alas! it has always been my fate to see my heroes and heroines dashed rudely to the ground sooner or later.

‘Poor Mrs. Binks,’ sighed Berengaria as we drove away. ‘Five children at home, and five hundred a month. No wonder she stays with her husband in the plains.’

So poor Mrs. Binks’ complexion had been immolated on the altar of stern necessity. I couldn’t help regretting it. It would have been so much more interesting if it had been the sacrifice of wifely devotion to Mr. Binks.

It was at the next house, at Mrs. Ipplethwaites’, that the event of the morning happened. I can’t say I found Mrs. Ipplethwaite particularly interesting for the first four or five minutes, but, then, Berengaria had not given her much chance. However, I discovered she was fond of dogs and horses, and anybody who is fond of animals must have some good in them somewhere.

‘My husband and I have been for years in very lonely places,’ she told me, ‘and I don’t know what we should have done without our dogs and horses. They have been such good company, almost as intelligent as human beings.’

‘But not so intelligent as Peter,’ put in Berengaria. ‘Do show Peter to my cousin, will you?’

Mrs. Ipplethwaite called out to one of the servants to bring Peter. A moment later out in the veranda I heard a familiar ‘Oo-ugh—oo-ugh’ that made me grow kind of rigid. Then Peter entered. He was the baboon who had visited me the night before!

Just inside the room he stopped dead and looked

at me. He looked long and steadily, as if considering whether he knew me. Then he evidently decided that he did, and showed his teeth in a huge expansive grin.

‘He’s very shy with strangers at first,’ said Mrs. Ipplethwaite, ‘and he generally won’t have anything to say to you until he gets to know you quite well.’

Peter was quietly dancing up and down with the same smile upon his face, exactly as he had done round and round my bed.

‘Salaam, Peter, salaam,’ commanded his mistress.

Peter stopped dancing, and salaamed before me down to the ground. As he rose up I could almost have sworn that he winked at me.

‘I don’t know if he will shake hands,’ Mrs. Ipplethwaite went on, ‘but we’ll ask him. Shake hands, Peter.’

Peter solemnly advanced and held out his hand, probably that very hand that had rested in such a nasty, damp, clammy way upon my knee but a few hours before. Peter gazed at me steadily with a sort of knowing look on his face as we shook hands. Then he positively winked. It was as much as to say, ‘What a tale we could tell if we liked, couldn’t we?’

‘He seems to have taken to you wonderfully,’ said Mrs. Ipplethwaite. ‘He’s really the quaintest creature and most extraordinarily human. But occasionally he’s very naughty—aren’t you, Peter?—and escapes from the house at nights. Only last night he managed to get loose again, and

what do you think he returned home with this morning ?’

‘What was it, Peter ?’ I said, stooping over him to cover my fear of what was coming. Peter looked more knowing than ever. Then he sidled up to me, and laid his head down in my lap.

‘It was a stocking,’ said Mrs. Ipplethwaite, ‘a lady’s black silk stocking.’

‘How extraordinary,’ I laughed.

‘I wonder whose,’ put in Berengaria meditatively ; ‘there can’t be many of them in Slumpanugger.’

I think Peter’s instinct must have told him I was getting nervous. He lifted his head, and looked up at me earnestly with his serious monkey face as if he wanted to tell me that I could rely upon him to act as a gentleman, and never say a word.

‘How he could have got it I can’t think,’ said Mrs. Ipplethwaite.

‘There can’t possibly be more than four ladies here,’ murmured Berengaria musingly, ‘who possess such things.’

I felt that Berengaria’s curiosity was quite indecent. It was narrowing things down a bit too much. I offered up again much gratitude that that stocking was not emblazoned with my name, as that dreadful pocket-handkerchief had been on board ship.

‘It’s perfectly extraordinary,’ Mrs. Ipplethwaite remarked to me again, ‘how Peter has taken to you at first sight. I’ve never known him take so much to anyone the first time he’s met them before.’

I stroked Peter's head, and he slipped his hand into mine.

'It's wonderful,' exclaimed Mrs. Ipplethwaite.

'We must ask everyone at the club to-night. "Have you lost a black silk stocking?"' persisted Berengaria. 'It sounds so dreadful, and yet of course it's quite all right, being only Peter. We must make it a catchword, "Have you lost a black silk stocking?"'

I was surprised at Berengaria and quite pained.

'It's a very good one,' said Mrs. Ipplethwaite, 'quite as good as you could get.'

I admired Mrs. Ipplethwaite for her discrimination. One always likes to hear one's garments described as 'good,' even when adverse circumstances have deprived one of the use of them.

'What a pity you can't send Peter to find the pair to it,' said Berengaria.

'It really is,' laughed Mrs. Ipplethwaite as we rose to go. 'Because, after all, one black silk stocking is so very useless, isn't it?'

I laughed nervously.

'Peter, you must either take it back or find its pair,' I said, as he accompanied us down the veranda steps. He still looked up at me with that quaint monkey expression of his—half earnest, half comical, as if though you amused and interested him very much he could not wholly understand you.

'It's really marvellous,' were Mrs. Ipplethwaite's last words. 'I've never before seen Peter take to anyone so much as he has to you at first sight.'

But as we drove away I wondered if it really was at first sight that Peter had taken a fancy to me. Could it be possible that he really did recognise me ?

Besides Mrs. Binks and Mrs. Ipplethwaite every one else was *darwaza bandh*, except Mrs. Proudfoot, who was *ghussal karte*. After we got home again I went to my room to rest for an hour before tea. Berengaria said that everyone in India always disappeared for an hour in the afternoon. You need not sleep unless you liked. There was no compulsion about that. But you must disappear. So with a book I disappeared into my room.

In front of the dressing-table I stood still in amazement. There, very badly rolled up, not wholly innocent of dirt, as if it had been dragged along the ground, lay my lost black silk stocking. Nobody could have rolled it up like that and brought it there save Peter. Dear Peter, he must have taken my laughing words to heart. Wasn't it kind and sweet of him to have brought it back ? No human thief would ever have done that. I fell in love with Peter straight away.

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CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS DAY IN SLUMPANUGGER

CHRISTMAS DAY in India was just like tobogganing in June. You all sat round and smiled, and pretended you were doing it and enjoying it real fine, though all the time you knew quite well it was a farce. Faith, as the little boy defined it, is the power that makes you believe things you know aren't true. It needs a lot of faith to make believe it's a real Christmas out in India.

Just imagine trying to celebrate Christmas on a perfect summer's day in June. Doesn't the imagination of the stay-at-home reel at it straight away? It was a glorious day, that twenty-fifth of December I spent in Slumpanugger. But it wasn't Christmas Day. It was all just exquisite when you let yourself forget how inappropriate it all was. From dawn till sunset the sun shone gloriously in a cloudless blue sky, and it was warm like an English summer's day.

We had a fire, it is true, but as Berengaria said, it was much more to look at than to sit by. That fire certainly made things look much more appro-

priate to the day than anything else had done, It was a real good fire too, on a big, wide open hearth, no coal, all great glowing logs of wood that crackled and scattered sparks in quite the proper orthodox way. It looked right down cheerful and homelike, and it made you think of absent friends. The only objection to it was its warmth. You liked it very much, but you edged away from it by degrees until at last you had backed into the furthest wall. If only one could have had the fire without the warmth it would have been just perfect.

In the morning everybody went to church. It was a nice little church that most of us had helped to decorate the day before. India certainly is a place where things grow, and there's no difficulty when you want to make a church look dressed. In fact, that service where we sang the Christmas hymns and heard the old familiar service was as much like home as it could be when once you forgot the glorious sunlight that streamed in through the open windows, and the row of giant palms that stood like sentinels without.

I had no idea there were as many people in Slumpunugger as turned up to that service. They were of all sorts and conditions, and of many colours. I mentioned my surprise to Berengaria as we drove home.

'There are lots of people one never sees in every Indian station,' Berengaria informed me. 'You see, if you are not a member of the Club, you may live in a place for years and never be seen.'

That seemed rather an unhappy fate, and I

guessed that to be a member of the Club is the first thing needful in India. It's a kind of hall mark that you can't well do without. Membership may not mean that you are anybody very much, but non-membership certainly means that you are nobody at all.

'It is not that our Mofussil Clubs are at all exclusive,' Berengaria went on, 'in fact, they generally err far too much the other way. But even they have to draw the line somewhere. Why, actually only the other day, there was a talk of proposing the Penins.''

The Penins, I found, claimed to be Portuguese. It's wonderful how many Portuguese there are in India. Considering the fewness of the original Portuguese adventurers they must have been a wonderful race.

'Mrs. Penino is large and fat,' discoursed Berengaria. 'All Eurasians grow large and fat very soon if they don't get skinny and wizened. It's hard to know which is the lesser evil of the two.' Berengaria sighed as if she had a personal interest in the question. 'Which would you rather be, Nicola, large and fat or skinny and wizened?'

Of course I was diplomatic.

'Oh, large and fat,' I said decidedly. 'I never could stand people who looked as if they were starved.'

Berengaria smiled with delight. Though she is not a Eurasian it cannot be denied that she has already developed a tendency towards the large and fat.

‘So would I,’ she agreed. ‘Now the Miss Peninos—there are three of them—will, I think, be of the lean kind. They are frightfully skinny so far, very long and very brown, and they love bright colours, especially peacock blue. That’s really all there is to say about them.’

Berengaria dismissed the Peninos with a wave of the hand as we reached home, and began to talk of the dinner-party she was giving that night. She told me that it was the ‘dustur’ of Slumpanager for the Commissioner mem-sahib to give a big dinner to all the station on Christmas Day, and she always did it, as she believed in keeping up ‘dusturs,’ because they linked one up with the past. The ‘dustur,’ as you will have guessed, means the custom of the country, and when you meet one of them, Berengaria once solemnly warned me, it’s always best to give in to it straight away. India is a place with any number of ‘dusturs’ knocking around, and the people have an affection for them. You can fight against them if you like, but if you want a peaceful life take Berengaria’s advice and don’t.

It was a great event in Slumpanager—that Christmas dinner. Everybody who was anybody was invited to it, and, as Berengaria put it, the company was ‘a bit mixed.’ The difficulty was how to send them down, because they all imagined they had precedence of some kind, and the less they had the more huffy they were if they didn’t get it. So Berengaria had discarded that bugbear of the Indian hostess—the table of precedence—

for the occasion, and had decided to make people draw lots in a cheery happy-go-lucky way.

‘It’s wonderful what a difference it makes to the success of a dinner,’ Berengaria told me. ‘Now, every time I dine out I have to go down with the host, and he is generally without exception the dullest man in the room, and when we give a dinner there is bound to be some old fogey we have to invite, and of course I have to go down with him. It’s dreadfully dull, and I have never been down to dinner yet with the nicest men in the station except when I’ve had them to dine in a quiet informal sort of way. Now about this Christmas dinner there is such a delightful uncertainty. It’s just a lottery. You never know your luck. You may get somebody nice to go in with, or you may not. I always make people draw names like Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and Ophelia, etc. A Juliet fat and forty adds to the merriment of things.’

After breakfast Berengaria asked me to write out names like those on little slips of paper to be drawn when the time came. I was sitting racking my brains and trying to remember how famous people ran in couples when several callers were announced. Young Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere was one of them, and he at once attached himself to me, and of course saw what I was doing. Now, Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere had been honouring me with his attentions quite markedly during the few days I had been in Slumpanugger, to the entire neglect of his old love, Miss Proudfoot. He was one of those dreadfully self-satisfied young men with

no brains to speak of, a fine moustache, and a blasé air. Needless to say, he was not my style at all.

‘What luck!’ he said in his tired haw-haw voice as he sat down beside me. ‘Arrived in the nick of time. Can’t stand these dinners where you have to draw. Ten to one you draw something awful.’ He searched among the little slips of paper I had already written. Then he picked up one and put it in his pocket. He handed me another with what he evidently thought a killing air.

‘Why should we draw?’ he said looking at me as if I were a prize sheep in a lottery. ‘Let’s consider that fixed up, shall we?’

Before I could say anything someone came up and began to talk to us. The little slip of paper lay on my lap. It bore the name of ‘Juliet.’ ‘Romeo,’ I presumed, reposed in the pocket of Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere. I was furious, justly and properly furious.

I got hold of Berengaria quietly when the last of the callers had gone.

‘Who of all those coming to-night,’ I asked her, ‘would you say that a conceited young man who fancies himself greatly would least like to take down to dinner.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Tomasino,’ laughed Berengaria promptly. ‘She’s quite the plainest woman I have ever seen. She’s quite black, and she will insist on talking though she never talks sense. We have to ask her to a dinner like this, you know, because her husband is an official of sorts and actually on the table of precedence itself.’

'An ideal 'Juliet' for Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere,' I said. I told Berengaria what had happened, and she, loving Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere no more, fully entered into the spirit of the thing. It was arranged that for once in her life, at least, Mrs. Tomasino should know what it was to have a 'Romeo.'

Dinner-time came, and with it the guests. Mrs. Tomasino was amongst the first to arrive. She was appalling in tight pink satin. I even felt a passing wave of pity for Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere as I gazed at her. But it quickly fled as that young man swaggered in with his cocksure air. I took round the little silver bowl with the ladies' names in, dropping in 'Juliet' before handing it to Mrs. Tomasino last of all. I saw a pleased look flash across her face as she read it. In a moment the gong sounded. The men were rushing round trying to find their affinities, and leading them off to the dining-room as they found them. Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere sauntered up with his self-satisfied air, pulling 'Romeo' from his waistcoat pocket.

'Juliet, I think,' he said with a killing smile and bow. He crooked his arm to lead me away.

'Steady on there, steady on there,' I said mockingly, 'you must have made a mistake. I'm Mrs. 'Arris.'

Mr. de Vere-Smith-de-Vere's wooden face expressed a mild surprise. It expressed something stronger a moment later.

'Oh, Romeo,' said a harsh and would-be playful

voice behind us, 'Oh, Romeo, I'm Juliet. Wherefore art thou, Romeo?'

Mrs. Tomasino in the tight pink satin was positively wriggling with delight and satisfaction. Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere stood aghast. In a trice he was appropriated. A big, fat brown arm was thrust through his, and he was led away.

All of us who were still left in the room paused to watch them pass. It was Mrs. Tomasino's night out. She was conscious that for the moment she held the stage. It intoxicated her. But the doorway loomed near. She could not let her triumph rest, she must add to it. Beaming round she stopped and tapped the unhappy Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere playfully on the arm with her fan.

'Oh, Romeo,' she smirked, wriggling horribly inside the pink satin, 'do you really wish you were thy Juliet's bird?'

After that they kind of shot through the doorway. I guess it was Mr. de Vere Smith de Vere who put the impetus on. Anything more complete than that young man's discomfiture one couldn't wish to see. He crumpled up and got limp straight away. It was as if you had suddenly sprinkled a nice starched collar and shirt front with water. It was a dreadful warning to all would-be Romeos. However charming you may think yourselves, young men, don't make too sure of Juliet.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRIUMPH OF MR. ELGEE POTTS

WE left for Delhi next day. The departure of Berengaria was exciting to herself and to everybody else anywhere near by. It took the united efforts of John, an ayah, six chaprassis, and various other dusky, ill-clad bodies to accomplish it. But we were off at last, and the train was not more than an hour late. Berengaria said that that was lucky as it was often much later than that on branch lines in India. We were to get to Bandalnagger at five o'clock that afternoon, where we joined the main line, and we were due at Delhi at the unbecoming hour of six o'clock next morning, though from all accounts we were not likely to arrive there anything like as early as that. The block in the traffic, they told us, all along the line was awful. Even that branch line, where nothing ever happened, felt it. It did its best to buck up, and actually succeeded in landing us at Bandalnagger Junction only two hours and fifteen minutes late.

There we had dinner at the refreshment-room—a huge long dinner of many courses, very solid, and

ending up with curry, all for two rupees. Then we disposed ourselves to wait for the Lieutenant-Governor's train, which was due at nine o'clock. Once we joined that, Berengaria said, we should be all right. Being the Lieutenant-Governor's guests, everything would be done for us right along, and we need not worry ourselves about anything any more all through. Berengaria was a great friend of Lady Mullins. Hence the invitation. John's official position, it seemed, though a high one, did not entitle him to be asked as a Government guest at the Durbar. The invitation was solely due to Berengaria. Berengaria consequently was much elated at having accomplished socially what John had not been able to do officially.

'It's all very well to say that the days of our influence are over in India,' Berengaria said as we sat waiting the arrival of the train, while John paced up and down the platform. 'But there's no denying the fact that we women can still have things pretty much our own way if we like. I always do all I can on principle. I've married John, and I regard it as my duty to do all I can for him in every way.'

Berengaria paused. My thoughts flew home-wards. I realised with something of regret how very little there would be that I could do in that way for the one round whom those thoughts centred. What could a wife hope to do for a man who was going to be a Duke and a millionaire. I could have almost wished just then that he was none of these things, but just a simple commoner unknown to

fame for whom a wife might do so much. I looked at Berengaria and almost envied her. She was so strong, so vigorous, so full of energy. What did she not represent to John? What would he be without her? I think Berengaria felt my unspoken sympathy. She grew confidential.

‘John is so unambitious,’ she said with a sigh. ‘He’s perfectly content with what he is, and that’s fatal. Contentment may be a great gain in one way, but it’s absolutely fatal in a service like ours. You must push. It’s vulgar, it’s deteriorating, it’s horrible, but it must be done. If you don’t do it you get left. If it had not been for me I really don’t know what would have happened to John. He would have been left stuck away in some dreadful station where only two sorts of people congregate—those who are sent there in disgrace and those who are too content or too apathetic to worry Government to transfer them.’

Just then John strolled up and joined us.

‘Any news of the train?’ asked Berengaria.

‘None,’ said John, in his cheerful, absent-minded way. ‘Not left Mandalghur yet.’ He stood and beamed upon us for a moment, pipe in hand, and then passed on.

‘There,’ said Berengaria smilingly, with a little helpless gesture of her hands, ‘what would have become of a man like that without me? He’s perfectly content to go on walking that platform until the train comes. He’s not a bit impatient. Fortunately that train will come some time or other, but it isn’t always the same with promotion if you

only sit still and wait for it. I really believe John would have jogged along quite contentedly in the dreadful little station I found him in when I married him if I had not gone round and stirred things up.'

'I always wonder,' I put in, 'just exactly how women do use the influence one hears so much about.'

Berengaria smiled in a wise, subtle sort of way.

'As you are not a rival I will give you the clue,' she laughed. 'An ounce of tact and a well placed smile are all the weapons you want. If you happen to have a pair of fine eyes you can use them too ; but they are not essential. The tact and the smile will carry you through.'

'Ah, but you must have something to go upon first,' I interrupted. 'You must be charming to start with or the tact and the smile won't work.'

'There I don't agree with you at all,' said Berengaria. 'Acquire tact and a smile, and you can't fail to be charming. To be tactful means to be everything that is desirable, and to get what you want in the nicest possible way. Now look at Mrs. Croydon. She's plain. She's no longer young ; she's not even a good conversationalist ; she's not even clever beyond having discovered the power of tact and a smile. But just see what she has done. Mr. Croydon is nothing brilliant in any way, yet he has held practically all the coveted posts there are, which nobody dreams for a moment he would have got but for Mrs. Croydon. And how

has she done it? Simply by tact and the cultivation of a smile. She has never offended anybody, and she has used her smiles so well and wisely upon those in authority that she has had half a dozen of them at her feet at once. The present Chief Secretary is her devoted admirer, and would do anything she wants, while all the ambitious younger men in the service crowd round her like a swarm of flies. They say she has made up her mind to be Lady Croydon and L.-G.'s wife, and I should not be surprised if she did it. She is the most deadly rival I've got.'

Berengaria's sigh of commiseration was lost in the clanging of the bell that heralded the approach of the L.-G.'s train. At least, I called it the clanging of the bell from force of habit, but they don't have bells in India as far as I have seen. They use a piece of iron rail hung up with a little bit of string which a coolie strikes in a manner to deafen everything with ears within reach of it.

Berengaria and I discovered our names on the door of our compartment without much difficulty. But, alas! the other two occupants had been before us, and, of course, they had taken the lower berths. The carriage looked absolutely full already, with any number of trunks and boxes, and lots of clothes and sundries hanging up on pegs beside the two well-tucked-up sleeping forms on the lower berths. At least, they were not sleeping forms any longer from the moment we tried to get in. How they must have anathematised us. One of them had to get up to drag a huge dressing-case away from

the door to let us get in. Then dreadful, half-naked coolies clambered in to haul up our luggage, jabbering unintelligible things and letting in lots of nasty raw cold air. I got in first, and tried to make our belongings look as small as possible, while Berengaria superintended from the platform. It would not have been an easy task at the best of times to make Berengaria's trunks look small, but with at least one if not two pairs of eyes glaring at you with a glare that seemed to make you grow smaller and your luggage grow larger every moment, it was embarrassing in the extreme. Berengaria had insisted on bringing practically everything that would get through the doorway into the carriage with us.

'You will learn two things by experience when you have done a little more Indian travelling,' was all she had remarked, when I ventured a mild protest. 'The first and foremost is never by any chance to travel without a luncheon-basket, for you never know where you may get stranded, and India is no place for a hungry white man to be stranded in. The second is, never lose sight of your luggage if you have any desire for it to arrive with you at the end of the journey.'

So one after another those trunks and dressing-cases and hat boxes were handed in till the carriage seemed full of them, and it was a question how Berengaria was to get in at all. But she achieved it in the determined way she tackled most things, and by clambering up on to two big boxes she managed to shut the door behind her and the train

was off. I trusted Ermyntrude was safe on board, but I couldn't get near enough to a window to put my head out, so I had to content myself with the hope. Ermyntrude left behind on the Bandalnugger railway platform was too awful a catastrophe to contemplate.

Berengaria stood by the door, surveying the medley of luggage that filled the carriage with the air of a conquerer surveying a fallen city. Then her eyes fell on the nearer of the two forms tucked up in bed.

'Why, it's Mrs. Croydon,' she exclaimed. Then I knew what Berengaria had meant. I saw the tact and the smile at the same time. It must have been horribly annoying to be awakened like that in the middle of a cold winter's night. Yet Mrs. Croydon smiled. She seemed to take a real personal interest in us both straight away.

'The question is,' she said, after the first preliminary greetings which had involved an introduction to myself were over, 'how are you going to get to bed?'

We all laughed. I was at one end of the carriage and Berengaria was at the other. A medley of trunks and boxes rose up like a rugged range of hills between us. Bitterly cold as it was, Mrs. Croydon even got up and helped us to clear the floor a bit. She came to my rescue as I struggled with the upper berth, which I tried in vain to lower—it's really quite an art to do it if you are not particularly strong and there happens to be a sleeping form on the berth below. The woman on that lower berth

had long since turned her face to the wall, and, metaphorically speaking, passed us by on the other side. But Mrs. Croydon was quite unwearied in helping us. She just won my heart straight away. Berengaria might call it tact, but I called it something a good deal more. That woman had the heart of a real good Samaritan.

That night was the first time in my life that I had ever made my own bed. It was certainly the most awkward bed to make that you could possibly imagine. You had to stand on the edge of the lower berth, where an irate would-be-asleep form lay, cling on with one hand and spread out your sheets and rugs as best you could with the other. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Croydon I don't think I should ever have done it, and I should probably have slept all night in a bundled up sort of heap, with half my clothes on instead of properly like an ordinary respectable being in bed. The last difficulty, however, was climbing up into that bed after you had made it. I can't rightly say what I looked like as I did it, but Berengaria hoisting herself heavily up, greatly impeded by a pink night-dress, was truly a sight for the gods. It was Mrs. Croydon who pulled the green shades over the lamps and kind of tucked us up, and bade us a smiling good-night.

I was a bit afraid at first of falling out of my exalted berth during the night, but I soon fell asleep, and slept quite soundly in spite of the rattling of the train and several stoppages at noisy wayside stations. It was bitterly cold when I woke up,

and already quite light. I looked out over the edge of my berth, and Mrs. Croydon's pleasant face was the first thing I saw.

'Good-morning,' she said, 'I hope you have slept well.'

'Most remarkably well,' I answered shivering. 'But, my ! how cold it is, and how are we going to get dressed in a tiny space like that ?'

I surveyed the few square feet of floor that peeped out from among our boxes with dismay. Mrs. Croydon laughed gaily. I believe she laughed at everything that came along all life through. It's much the best way to look at life if you can, but you have to be built that way to do it.

'Oh, we shall manage all right if we get up one by one,' she said cheerfully. 'The train is frightfully late, so there is no chance of our reaching Delhi yet, and we needn't hurry. We shall probably have breakfast on the train. But the one thing I am pining for is my morning cup of tea.'

Even as she spoke we drew up at a station, and the faithful Ermyntrode appeared with a kit-matgar carrying the welcome tray. At that Berengaria awoke too, and we all fell upon the tea and toast and bananas and devoured them.

When we had finished I began to get up. It was quite obvious that we should have to do it one by one, so as I always take an age to get dressed, even with Ermyntrode to help me—and Ermyntrode couldn't possibly be got inside the carriage now—I thought at half-past seven that it was time one of us made a start. Did ever train jolt and

sway like that one? Painfully, with many bumps and much difficulty, I finally succeeded in getting fully clothed, and sat down on a box in a corner to make room for other people.

The unknown, who had occupied the berth below mine, was the last to get up. I wondered if I looked quite such a wreck as she did. I guess no woman looks her best when she first gets out of bed in the morning, in spite of all the poets say. This woman certainly didn't, and she evidently knew it. She scrambled into her clothes in real lightning speed. The improvement in her when she was fully dressed was wonderful. I wondered who she was. Evidently neither Mrs. Croydon nor Berengaria knew her. I had scarcely seen her full face until she sat down opposite me. Then I knew that I had seen her before. But where? For a moment I was puzzled, but only for a moment. Then I recognised her. It was Fluffy. But a Fluffy so changed that it was not surprising I had not recognised her straight away at first sight.

The old Fluffy was gone. There was hardly a vestige of her left. The framework was the same, but, after all, it isn't the framework that matters most to a woman with determination. So long as you've got a head with eyes and nose and mouth, and a skin to cover it, you can rig it out pretty much as you like. A quantity of somebody else's hair and teeth, and plenty of powder and paint work wonders. It was only about ten days before that I had seen Fluffy being married in Bombay in all the glory of her war-paint, fully

rigged out, and looking in the distance like a gay young thing of twenty-five. She had grown twenty years older every way in those ten days. Her hair was no longer fluffy, and it wasn't gold any more. It was quite a proper, respectable brown, and it was done up neatly in an entirely unnoticable way. Her complexion was no more pink and white, but the ordinary rather-the-worse-for-wear complexion of a woman of forty-five. As for the gay and festive costumes that Fluffy used to wear on every occasion, in season and out of season, one wondered what fate had befallen them. Fluffy was dressed modestly and soberly as a woman of forty-five on a long railway journey should be.

Fluffy's eyes met mine full. I tried to keep the bulginess out of mine as much as I could, but I guess they looked a bit surprised. And then what do you think happened? Fluffy cut me dead! I had never been cut in my life before, so far as I knew, and at first I didn't quite know how I felt after it. It was done in the coolest, most collected way possible, but there was no mistaking it. Now I suppose there must be some satisfaction in cutting people or no one would do it. But for Fluffy to go and cut me was about the most suicidal thing she could do if she didn't want the people in that camp to know all about her. If she had been just ordinarily polite, and behaved herself, I might have hesitated before giving her away, thinking she wanted to lead a new life, and all that sort of thing. I believe in giving everybody a chance But to go and behave like an

ostrich with its head in the sand, and imagine that her past didn't rise up at once and stare me in the face, was too absurd. It was not to be expected of human nature not to give her away. So I told Berengaria all about her, and, of course, Berengaria told everybody else. I'm afraid she had rather a bad time in that camp. I always wondered how long she would think it worth while to remain dull and respectable.

We were still miles away from Delhi, so we had breakfast on board the train. But as ours was not a corridor carriage we had to get out at a wayside station in order to get in at the dining car. Then we had to sit in the dining car for about an hour after we had finished breakfast, waiting for another station to get down at and back to our own compartment. It was not a good arrangement, but quite Indian. I guess we in the States think England a delightfully antiquated place, but India is a good bit more so, though, to do it justice, I imagine it has made a pretty good step forward during the last fifty years. I often thought how delightful it would be if one could get a glimpse of India as it was a hundred years ago. Everything is getting horribly modern out there now, and the new clothes on the old garments look patchy. Just imagine travelling thousands and thousands of miles across India before the days of railways came. It must have been charmingly picturesque and interesting, but just a bit slow. Though I guess if you had never gone any faster you wouldn't notice it, and probably think yourself quite rapid

and very far advanced. It all depends on what you've been accustomed to.

We were only five hours late, and we were nearing Delhi at last. We could hear the guns announcing the arrival of some Indian prince or big official. Our train, containing the Lieutenant-Governor, whom I had not yet seen, would be greeted with a salute of thirteen guns. I felt aglow with reflected glory at the thought of those thirteen guns. Is there anything quite like the sound of a salute to give you a prickly sort of feeling all down the back? How delightful it must be to hear them booming out just for you alone. But, alas, like most things in life, those guns generally come too late. Just when you are almost on the shelf, and just about worn out after thirty years' service, and retirement looms ahead, then you may with great luck hear those guns, but every time they thunder out they must seem to bring with them the sound of a farewell.

But, although we were so near to Delhi, we were not to get in yet. Some way outside we came to a dead stop on what seemed to be a side line. And there we waited. It was long after we were due, but even now it seemed that they weren't ready for us. Presently, up behind us, came another train, which drew up also on a side line across the way. It was the Lieutenant-Governor's train of another province, but it also had to wait. It was just a trifle damping when I had counted on sweeping into Delhi in such state to the accompaniment of those thirteen guns. Nobody knew what we

were waiting for. John came and talked to us, and told us he had asked the driver and the guard why we were delayed, but they neither of them knew. It grew to nearly half an hour that we had waited there, and still no signs came of our getting in. Then at last there was a rush and a roar, and a train swept by us and dashed on into Delhi. We were all very excited to know what important personage it could contain that it had kept two Lieutenant-Governors' trains waiting all that time. Berengaria was particularly indignant.

'It must be either the Governor of Bombay or the Governor of Madras,' she declared, 'or else the Nizam of Hyderabad. They would never dare to keep a Lieutenant-Governor waiting for anybody else.'

At last our time came, and we did sweep in, followed by the other Lieutenant-Governor's train. So they only gave us thirteen guns between us, which I thought was mean. But they sounded all right, and there was such confusion worse confounded going on in Delhi Station that I don't think it really much mattered. Then at last we found out for whom we had been kept waiting. It was for Mr. Elgee Potts, of U.S.A.! Oh, Indian officialdom, oh, autocratic Litutenant-Governors! how was it that this came to pass? The almighty dollar had stormed the last defences, and triumphed even over the Indian Beaucrocity. Mr. Elgee Potts, in his special train, had bought the right, at some enormous figure that makes the lay mind reel, to travel through first everywhere before everybody, save

only the Viceroy himself. I suppose I ought to have felt real proud of my own countryman and the almighty dollar, but as it was sympathy for Berengaria's indignation and for Indian officialdom so rudely cast aside took entire possession of me. I and that Lieutenant-Governor's party entered Delhi just the least little bit subdued and thoughtful.

CHAPTER XIII

I MEET AN A.D.C.

Now I am not going to write anything like a full and connected account of the great Durbar. I guess that has been done hundreds of times already. I am simply going to jot down some of the impressions it made on an irresponsible sort of spectator like me. I had no time to make anything more than very scrappy jottings in my diary in the rush and hurry of the moment, so if occasionally you find me a bit vague and inaccurate, as I often find Aunt Agatha, you will understand the reason. But please don't get as annoyed with me as I sometimes do with Aunt Agatha.

It was frightfully cold in Delhi. That was really one's first impression when you came to think about it. But it was a delightful crisp sunny sort of cold that bucked you up wonderfully, and you forgave it, though it did try its best to crack your skin and plough deep furrows in your lips. The second impression as you emerged from Delhi Station was that you felt you must have arrived in the Strand by mistake. Not the noisiest, busiest, most crowded

street in the world could have beaten Delhi that morning of our arrival. Yet, of course, when the first bewildering glimpse of crowds of vehicles blocking the way and crowds of pedestrians lining the sides of the roads—there didn't seem to be any paths—and darting under the horses' heads, had passed, you saw that, though it had many points in common with the Strand, there was a difference.

A delightful carriage and pair with coachman and groom in gorgeous red and gold had been allotted to us, and we drove away in style, though our stately progress was somewhat marred by all sorts of quaint vehicles that kept getting in our way, and impeding us all along the route. There were tongas which looked as if they had come out of the Ark drawn by bullocks, and tongas drawn by horses—skinny, bony animals, but evidently wiry from the plucky way they rattled and galloped along when they got a clear bit of road to let themselves go upon. Then there were ekkas, quaint little native carts, where you sat sideways like a jolting-car, while the shafts met in a sort of saddle over the pony's back, and the reins were mostly the ubiquitous little bits of string. In one long line at a snail's pace, and oftenest blocking up the road, crept by a never-ending string of bullock-carts, heavily laden with furniture and stores of all sorts piled high, and held on precariously by straw-plaited ropes that occasionally take the place of the little bits of string. Here and there an elephant met us, lumbering along with solemn, stately tread, but alas! too often with an ugly bundle on his back that went ill with his

dignified and lordly mien. It reminded me of a smart and well-dressed woman gracefully sailing on unconscious of the little wisp of hair that had escaped behind and marred the whole effect. A camel with his big, ungainly feet that yet fell so noiselessly upon the dusty road, his head held superciliously aloft, and his huge nostrils sniffing the air disdainfully, passed slowly by, obedient to the single guiding-rein that again was nothing more than a little bit of string.

In a flash we caught a glimpse of old Delhi as we swept under a magnificent gateway, time-worn and crumbling, taking one back suddenly out of the hustling present to memories of the long-since silent past. A turn of the road, and all again was modern—a marvellous glimpse of the law and order and precision that the British Raj has imposed upon chaos and disorder. Before us stretched miles and miles of tents shining dazzling white in the morning sun, trim, neat, in orderly lines, like a regiment marshalled for review. It was a marvellous sight, this vast encampment. It made one think of one of those vivid Biblical stories of some beleaguered city on a hill, with the hosts of the enemy encamped over against them on the plains below. The first glimpse of the Ridge is never to be forgotten. All that one has ever heard or read of it seems to flash before one as it rises into view. The very ground is sacred, pulsating with a thousand memories, and the air seems throbbing with the sound of many voices long since hushed. But this is the twentieth century, and we have come to celebrate the Proclamation of

a King, and though we fain would linger in the past the all-engulfing present sweeps us on.

The rows and rows of tents seemed never-ending—a vast canvas city of which even India, the land of tents, can hardly have seen the like before. Certainly not a city of tents like these. For above all, even above the vastness of it all, it was the trimness, the neatness, the exact precision, that struck one most. Not a rope was out of line, not a tent diverging by so much as an inch from its appointed place. It was just typical of the Durbar all through—an object-lesson of what the British have done. It has taken the mighty forces of this vast country, and swept them into line. Where all was confusion and disorder, chief against chief, an Empire divided against itself, crumbling to decay, the genius of the British race has slowly but surely imposed its will, welding all the discordant and conflicting elements into one united and harmonious whole—a triumph that has never been before achieved in all the countless ages of the history of Hindustan. Nothing was more striking at the Durbar than to watch the untutored, undrilled crowds gaping at this outward and visible sign of the order and precision that had swept them aside, and so wisely and firmly imposed its rule upon them.

Encampment after encampment we passed by, each in its own allotted space, smart sentries at the gates, water-carriers passing up and down the trim gravel paths between the tents with their huge skin water-bottles that again reminded one, as one so often is reminded in the East, of one's early child-

hood's pictures of the Bible. At last we reached our own camp, and swung in between two pillars innocent of gates, but supported by two smart native sentries, who made one feel delightfully important by saluting as one passed. I suppose one gets accustomed to being saluted and salaamed to in India, but at first it gives one a nice comfortable feeling every time it happens. One passes on feeling that, after all, one really can't be quite the despicable worm one sometimes half-suspects one is.

Our tents were just a revelation of what a tent can rise to if it tries. Mine was just fascinating. First of all it had a fireplace—which one didn't expect of a tent—with a delightful nice red fire of glowing logs that threw out a welcome at you as you entered straight away. I just fairly hugged that fireplace in joy and gratitude. Then the walls were not left bare like the walls of a common or garden tent, but hung with nice warm-coloured purdahs of Cashmir work that made the place real cosy. The boarded floor was an added luxury, and the thick red dhurri that covered it completed the right-down laughing cheerfulness of that tent. Never before or since have I seen a tent to compare with it.

Of course, Aunt Agatha would not have enjoyed it a bit for fear of its catching fire. Aunt Agatha is one of those people who never enjoy anything for fear of something happening. Now I think that is such a mistake. As I said before, I always go on gaily so long as it is light, and there are people about. It is only when it is dark, and there is a

nasty creeping feeling in the air, that I get kind of chilled.

The rest of that first day in Delhi we did not do much. We just explored our own camp, and got acclimatised. But later on we went over to the visitors' camp to see if Lady Manifold and Marjory had arrived. We had left the carriage outside, and were wandering about trying to find the Information Bureau to discover which of the maze of tents belonged to them, when we met our first American in Delhi. There was no mistaking her nationality. She just breathed out the States all round. She was alone, and looked as if she were a bit at sea. When she saw us she sailed at once towards us like a ship to port.

'Say,' she began, with that nasal twang that I knew was coming, 'say, can you tell me where the eating-house is?'

Berengaria looked at her as if she had been a walrus at the Zoo, and then passed on, politely disclaiming all knowledge of the eating-house.

'We are quite strangers in this camp,' I said smilingly. 'But if you ask that young man,' I added wickedly, as I saw a shy, prim, typically British young man coming along behind, 'I have no doubt he will be able to tell you.'

'Say, can you tell me where the eating-house is?' we heard her asking the shy young man as we passed on.

My only regret was that we could not linger to hear what that young man replied. Whether he knew where the eating-house was, or whether he

did not, anyway he took a long time telling her. I looked round when we got to the end of the road and they were still standing talking. My opinion of that prim young man went up straight away. There must have been something in him to keep a hungry American woman away from an eating-house even that space of time.

‘An eating-house!’ said Berengaria, with fine scorn. ‘Anyone would think we were a lot of animals at the Zoo. What a mercy you don’t talk like that, Nicola. But I suppose Americans are not all of one *jat*, any more than we are?’

‘I guess not,’ I said, not knowing in the least what a *jat* was, but knowing full well that we Americans are not just all of one anything.

There are just a few millions of people in the States when they are all totalled up, and I guess we are about the most diversified nation on earth. Pretty well every country on the face of the globe has helped to swell our population, so we are what you might call a mixed race. But it’s a very good mixture, and when we shake down a bit a few centuries hence we shall just about head the list among the most thriving and energetic nations on earth. The old nations want new blood. We are all new blood, and we shall be all the better when we have been kept a bit longer.

Lady Manifold and Marjory had not arrived, we discovered, when at last we found the Information Bureau, which turned out to be a tiny tent containing a tiny Babu in white drill, whose information was about all you could expect from the

size of him. He was not just born to run the Delhi Durbar. But he showed us the list of expected visitors in that camp. Berengaria read it with great awe. That list contained some of the smartest names in the English peerage, and looked real imposing to any commoner with ambitions that way.

That night at dinner I saw the whole of our camp collected together for the first time. Then I met Sir Henry and Lady Mullins. Sir Henry was a short little man with a parchment face and twinkling grey eyes. He was quite wonderfully alert considering he had done thirty-five years' service. Lady Mullins was tall and big, and just made to be a great official's wife. You could see straight away that she liked to move around and boss things, and that she would do it pleasantly when she could, but you mustn't get in the way. She was rather like Berengaria. There is no doubt that Berengaria would make an excellent Lieutenant-Governor's wife.

Now I can't say that that camp was just exactly lively. 'It's dull,' Berengaria declared in her outspoken way later on, 'very dull, and it's a great consolation that it isn't costing us a penny.' You see, the young element was rather lacking. In India you don't become a very important personage until you get on in life—not important enough, I mean, to be asked up as a government guest to a state thing like the Delhi Durbar. Unless, of course, you happen to be an A.D.C., when you can do and expect and get anything. I had heard so

much of the Indian A.D.C. that I was quite curious to meet him. I saw him that night—no less than four of him. Lieutenant-Governors are not attended like that generally, I believe, but this being a special occasion, everything red and gold and ornamental was doubled. I was a bit disappointed in those A.D.C.'s—not so much individually as collectively. I expected them to be much more of a type. But I am afraid that is rather like the Englishman who expects to find every American young woman a reproduction of the Gibson Girl—in which expectation, I guess, he is generally mightily disappointed. If those A.D.C.'s had not been in uniform you never would have picked them out as belonging to the same *jat*. By the way, I have discovered the meaning of that word *jat*, and I used it then quite unconsciously. That is the result of having lived with Berengaria. Like lots of Indian words it is most useful and expressive, and Berengaria having a store of such expressions, one finds one's self slipping quite naturally into the use of them. *Jat* means caste, and you use it in the sense of birth or rank. If you want to say anything nasty of anybody in a lady-like way you say, 'Oh, she's no *jat*,' and the poor thing is condemned straight away.

But about those A.D.C.'s. They were very young. They were very clean as only Englishmen can be. They were very pleased with themselves. They looked rather like over-grown schoolboys in absurd Eton jackets. But there all points of similarity ended. I rather hoped that the one

with the nice strong face, and who looked as if he could play polo, might take me in to dinner ; but I fell to the lot of someone much more important, and consequently ever so much more dull. Why is it that the more important you get the duller you become ? But I had another of the A.D.C.'s on my right. He was the smallest of the lot, so, of course, the most conceited. Why is it that small men always are the most conceited ? I suppose it is a kind of inverse ratio—the less there is of you the more you must prize it and make the most of it. I am glad there is quite a lot of me. But that little A.D.C. was quite amusing. Conceited people often are in a way they don't quite think.

'Awful joke, have you heard ?' he said as soon as I could escape from the dulness of the Revenue Secretary, who had taken me in.

'No,' I said, feeling after five minutes of the Secretary's conversation as if I had not heard a joke for years, 'What is it ?'

'Awful joke,' he repeated, chuckling—he was the kind of man who, when he thought he had a good phrase, just worried it to death—'just heard it from one of the Viceroy's staff. Ever heard of the Nawab of Chandalpur ? What ? No ? Why, bless my soul, he's an awful bug. Thinks no end of himself. Allied state, you know, not a dependency—all that sort of rot. Tommy-rot I call it. Well, old Nawab of Chandalpur arrives outside Delhi Station one A.M. Christmas mornin'. Should have been there ten P.M. Christmas Eve. Devil of a row because he wasn't. Anyway, there he was,

one A.M. Christmas Day drawin' up outside Delhi Station—the very last thing in special trains—blue and gold—all that sort of rot—waitin' until his salute began to descend in state, a twenty-one gunner he is, no end of a swell. Awful joke, the salutes didn't begin. There he sat inside, all ready dressed up in gold lace, any number of big bugs waitin' to receive him. But no salutes. For why? Because the order had gone out—no salutes on Christmas Day. Poor devils at the guns must have a rest sometimes. So, knowing that, that old Johnny of Chandalpur had timed his arrival two hours before Christmas Day began. But a block on the line and there he was—just one hour too late. Big officials yawnin' on the platform at one A.M., all dressed up in uniform, just wild. But what could do? Can't disobey orders. Orders were no salutes on Christmas Day. Yet was that old Johnny of Chandalpur going to get down without 'em? Not he. There he sat. Station-master just mad. Hundreds of other trains waitin' to come in, shriekin' themselves hoarse to know why the devil they were kept waitin'. Big political bug gets into the train, explains, puts it nicely, implores, beseeches, expostulates—that's what politicals are made for, just to coax Rajas and pat 'em on the back—but all no good. Has that old Johnny of Chandalpur travelled two thousand miles and spent fifty lacs to go hoppin' into Delhi without his twenty-one guns? Not he. Station-master at last won't stand it. Shunts Nawab of Chandalpur on to a siding, and what do you think?

There he stays the whole blessed day, cursin' and swearin' somethin' awful till just one minute past twelve o'clock next night. Then he descends in state with his twenty-one guns, fifty politicals bowin' down before him and apologisin'. Old fool, we're too kind to 'em by half.'

I felt a bit breathless as he came to a pause, as if I had just done the hundred yards on a motor. He had been going the pace like clockwork that wasn't quite in order and had got jerky.

'Do you know many other stories like that?' I asked him.

He looked round at me seriously.

'Let's see, do I?' he said thoughtfully, fixing his eye-glass and looking at me as if considering whether I was worth another. He seemed to make up his mind that I was.

'By jove, yes,' he said, refreshing himself before starting off again with a drink of champagne, 'of course I do. Ever heard of the Khan of Kotchibad? What, no again? Bless my soul, thought everybody had heard of the Khan of Kotchibad. Awful old buster. Always grousin' about somethin'. Files of correspondence in the F.O. all about nothin'. Never happy without a grievance. Well, he hears about Delhi. Pretends he's in an awful funk. Sets up for bein' orthodox, and frightened to death he'll be asked to do somethin' up here that no good Mussulman should. Hears about arrangements for the Durbar. Viceroy and Duke to stand on a daïs—*island sort of place*—and all the chiefs to walk round it as they come up to make their salaams.

Old Kotchibad frightfully excited. Wires up to F.O. post haste: "Strictly forbidden by Koran to circumambulate anything save father's tomb and tomb of the Prophet—can't possibly circumambulate Viceroy." Awful joke. I say, won't you have any simpkin ?

I gasped. That little A.D.C. was so unexpected.

'Simpkin ?' I said. 'What's that ?'

He looked round at me as if I were very young or else trying to pull his leg, I don't think he could quite make up his mind which.

'What, not know what simpkin is ? Well, I'm blest. Don't know why you should know, though, if you've not been in India. Don't call it simpkin at home, do you ? Haven't been home for so long, blest if I don't almost forget. Call it fizz there, though, I believe. Simpkin's what the natives call it. Can't say champagne, you know, can't get it round their tongues—the sound, I mean. not the drink, you know, they can do that fast enough—so they call it simpkin. Just the same stuff, though. Have some, won't you ?'

I had some simpkin while that little A.D.C. took what I guess he would call a 'breather.'

'Know the Begum of Ghosain ?' he went on again. 'What, not know her ? Thought everybody knew the Begum of Ghosain—the lady who's really purdah, but can't stop gadding about, so goes about with a table-cloth on her head—thought everybody knew the Begum of Ghosain. Well, she was comin' up to Delhi—catch the Begum missin'

a show like this. Train due yesterday. But didn't arrive. Everybody here wirin' all over the place—couldn't be found. And what do you think had happened? Why, the Begum—What, you ladies off? Oh, tell you another time. Awful joke!

Alas! Lady Mullins had caught the eye of the wife of the member of the Board of Revenue. So regretfully I left my little A.D.C. with the story of the Begum still untold. And what happened to the Begum, or what the Begum did, remains hidden from me until this day. For that poor little A.D.C. got fever in the night and never appeared again. I always wonder if it was the fever coming on that made him talk to me the way he did at dinner.

CHAPTER XIV

AN AMERICAN VICEREINE

NEXT day the real show began. The State Entry, which was to eclipse any entry ever previously made into Delhi, even in the far-off days of its Imperial greatness, was to be the beginning of things. There was a spirit of suppressed excitement in the air. Even before the dawn one felt that the whole of the vast encampment was astir. It was the first of the wonderfully organised and much-rehearsed events that were to fill the following days. Its success or failure would be an augury for those to come.

The streets of Delhi that morning were a sight one is hardly likely ever to see again. They were a moving mass of brilliant colour, a glorious jumble of the old-world east and the modern fashionable west—an east and west that it seemed impossible should ever meet save as they were meeting to-day, like the moving parts of a kaleidoscope passing and repassing, but never merging, always divided and apart.

The Jumma Musjid is just magnificent. As we

drove up the long road that faced it, its three swelling domes and lofty minarets looked down upon us, the very embodiment of the Imperial Delhi of the past. Time-worn, grey with the storms of centuries, it seemed as if it gazed out over the scene of to-day unseeing, wrapt in the memory of the past, and past days of triumph, before the infidel came to deprive it of its place as the cathedral temple of an Imperial race. And as one looked, it carried one back with it into the past. One saw dimly, as in a vision, something of what those grey walls had seen, and a kind of awe and veneration stole upon one as in the presence of great and honoured age.

We were there at last, high up among the domes and minarets, looking down on the wonderful panorama that lay stretched out before our eyes. Away against the sky ran the long line of the Fort, the old red walls of Shah Jehan's Palace a fitting background for the scene below. Lined by smart troops, the centre of the road was gradually clearing. The last arrivals were hurrying to their places. All along one side of the road were covered stands for the spectators whom the Jumma Musjid could not accommodate, filled with the rank and fashion of the west. Opposite, row on row, sat youths from the native schools in Delhi, representative of the youth of India—a lot of healthy, laughing, nut-brown boys strung to wonder and excitement by the doings of the day, each group distinguished by the different colours of the turbans worn, adding their brightness to the brilliant scene.

Away across the Champs de Mars stood a huge company of elephants clad in all the gorgeous trappings that even the eye of an Eastern could devise—one hundred and sixty-six of them, waiting to salute the Viceroy and fall in behind the procession to bring the magnificent pageant to a fitting close.

Behind us lay the huge courtyard with its majestic porches and graceful arcades, which but a few days before had been crowded with a vast throng of worshippers among the faithful, celebrating their great festival on the last Friday of Ramazan. How different a scene from that of to-day. India is a land of contrasts, but at Delhi it seemed as if they had collected them all and dumped them down together before one's eyes. Up that same road down which we looked, had come the Emperor Aurungzebe to worship in that same courtyard behind us at the Friday service. To-day we waited for the coming of a Viceroy of an English Emperor, who had succeeded to a greater than Aurungzebe's throne, yet to whom it would probably never be given to enter personally upon his great inheritance in the Imperial city of Hindustan.

The time of waiting went quickly by. Both within and without the Jumma Musjid there was so much to be seen. Close by us, watching everything with his quick, keen gaze, was the dear little Japanese Envoy, General Baron Yasukata Oku. Not far off was my Duchess of the *Arethusa*, and ever and anon amongst the crowd one caught a glimpse of a familiar face. But, of course, even here, where every prospect pleased, there was one

vile man, or rather it happened to be a woman. That woman made me feel absolutely murderous. She roused all my most prehistoric barbaric instincts, and I wanted to throw her down like they did Jezebel of old. That may sound strong, but you would not have said it was a bit too strong if you had heard that woman. Why is it that a foolish woman cannot keep her mouth shut? If you do happen to have had the bad luck to be born a fool, I should have thought the only thing to do would have been to keep quiet about it. Lots of people are fools, but they are just wise enough to know it and hush it up, and so they get along all right and nobody ever discovers that they really are fools. But, unfortunately, the majority of fools never discover that they are fools, and so they talk and give themselves away. That woman in the Jumma Musjid was a fool and one of the worst type. She thought herself clever. She was with an unhappy man, who was evidently ashamed of her but had not the courage to shut her up. Perhaps he was her husband, which would explain it. She was sitting just behind, so it was impossible for us to escape from her inanities.

‘Oh look, Decky dear, isn’t he sweet?’ she lisped ecstatically, leaning over the back of Berengaria’s chair. ‘Is he a Sikh or a Nepalese?’

‘Who do you mean?’ asked ‘Decky dear’ wearily—at least I think it was ‘Decky’ she called him. It sounded like that, and she probably thought it clever.

‘Oh, Decky, how can you be so stupid? As if

there was anyone else to look at when he was by. That man in blue and red with the big black beard. Oh, Decky, he is sweet, isn't he? Do you think he's a Sikh or a Nepalese ?'

'Certainly not Nepalese,' grunted 'Decky.'

'Oh, then he's a Sikh. I know he's a Sikh. But I thought Sikhs always wore green turbans. And a Sikh doesn't smoke, does he? Oh, I wish you were a Sikh, Decky.'

'Decky' said nothing, but I guess he squirmed. Everybody anywhere near round heard that she wished he were a Sikh, and it couldn't have been just pleasant.

For a moment there was a pause while the fool-woman scanned the landscape with her field-glasses. Then a gun boomed out and she began again.

'Oh, there are the guns, Decky. Somebody must be coming. Oh, Decky, don't the guns always make you feel ready for anything? I do wish you were a soldier, Decky. I am sure I should have been if I had been a man.'

I devoutly wished she had been a man. She might have been a fool even then, but a fool-man is better than a fool-woman any day. A man is so dreadfully afraid of ridicule that he never dare let himself go like a woman does.

'And the national anthem. Oh, Decky, I just love it. It makes me feel so loyal every time I hear it. Even when it's only played for one of the minor royalties I feel all prickly just the same.'

But I will not describe any more of her inanities.

I thanked heaven that she was not an American, but I devoutly wished that for half a day—no more—I might have been her husband.

Far away across the Champs de Mars from behind the fort had come at last the guns announcing that the Viceroy had arrived at Delhi. Hardly had the salute died away than the booming of the cannon came again for the arrival of the Duke of Connaught. A sudden hush of expectation fell upon all the crowd. All eyes were turned towards the ramparts of the Fort across the Champs de Mars beyond the group of elephants, where, away on the far left the great procession must at last emerge. Slowly, almost imperceptibly it came, the first advancing line of cavalry sweeping onwards like some dazzling serpent in the glorious midday sun. Yet another salute, and the flag over the Fort fluttered into place. The Viceroy had arrived opposite the Lahore Gate, and a quiver of excitement passed through the vast crowds as the long period of expectation drew near its close. And then at last the procession wheeled into the long straight Khas Road, down which we faced from our vantage-point on the terrace of the Jumma Musjid.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. Riding first, alone, came one officer ; then, behind him, smart and finished, as only British cavalry can be, came the Dragoon Guards. I forgave all the guardsmen I had ever met their swagger as I watched those perfect ranks march by. Who wouldn't swagger to be in authority over such men as they ? To see them turn and wheel and march obedient to one's slightest

word—to know that they would follow one, faithful even unto death—who wouldn't swagger strong in the knowledge of such loyalty as this? I have respected every guardsman I have ever met since. Then came the Royal Horse Artillery, no less inspiring, and great favourites with the crowd. More Dragoons and officers, and then—the Herald. Suddenly one was back in mediæval Europe. It was again the days of chivalry, of joust and tourney. The Herald, a blaze of red and blue and gold, with gorgeous tabard emblazoned with the arms of England, was riding, mace in hand, into the lists, his magnificent black charger pacing proudly, as if he knew full well that he was the cynosure of every eye. A moment and the splendid figure had passed by, and one's eye was riveted by the trumpeters—six native and six British—in coats of crimson velvet, lettered with the royal and imperial monogram on front and back. Hanging from the silver trumpets and the drums were banderoles, ablaze with the royal arms—the last touch of magnificence. Slowly they moved by, like some dream picture of the Middle Ages. In a flash one was back again amidst the pomp and glory of the India of to-day, as the Viceroy's bodyguard passed by—that splendid corps in gold and scarlet—the best mounted troops in all the East. And then, again, more splendid still, the Imperial Cadet Corps. Even then one felt that one had no adjective left to describe them, and the marvellous procession had but just begun. The ever-changing blaze of colour and magnificence literally smote one and made one dumb. Even

Berengaria had lost the power of speech. All one's senses seemed to be merged into the sense of sight. One's only thought was to see, to miss nothing of this wonderful pageant that would live in history for all time, and that was so quickly passing by.

Was there any figure in the whole procession prouder and more splendid than Sir Pertab Singh's? Sitting his black charger superbly, with all the high-born arrogance of the East, he rode at the head of his corps—the very flower of the youth of Imperial India, the princes and scions of the noblest families throughout the land. Their cream-white uniform, spotless, embroidered in gold, lit up by the perfect turquoise-blue of collar, cuffs, and cummerbund, wanted no better setting than their splendid black chargers with the famous snow leopard-skins that they carried so proudly. Triple chains of gold bound the inspiring motto of the corps 'For the King,' to their blue turbans, above which their golden aigrettes waved and nodded. Surely, in all the East, no prouder corps ever took service for any king. They seemed to sum up in one glittering array the pride of Hindustan—these proud scions of a noble race, beside whose pedigrees the longest and most honourable genealogy among the onlookers from the west was but a thing of yesterday. Truly, none but the first among Englishmen should be sent to govern such men as these.

They passed, and behind them, lo, another and a greater wonder. In one long massive line came the great feature of the day—the elephant procession. First, two and two, the elephants bearing

the Viceroy's staff, six of them, huge beasts surrounded by chobdars, who marched solemnly, maces in hand, on every side of them. But they needed none such to control them. Passively, submissively, they lumbered on, solemn with all the dignity of the East, typical of the huge forces that had bowed themselves at last to the law and order of the conqueror whose triumph they had come to celebrate to-day.

And then, on Lachman Prasad, the magnificent state elephant of the Maharajah of Benares, came the Viceroy and Vicereine — the very centre and moving force of the whole procession—the two figures round whom all the others were but those who went before and those who came after, and who had come to do them homage in the King-Emperor's name. And she was an American. I guess there was no American heart among all the crowd that did not beat the quicker as Lachman Prasad came slowly on, bringing that one of us of whom we are most proud, that one from our country in the West who has risen to a position far beyond that of any other of her daughters. It was a magnificent sight as Lachman Prasad paced solemnly by. The howdah, the same used by Lord Lytton in 1877, was of burnished silver, that flashed in the sunlight like a mirror, the royal arms resplendent on the side panels, with the crowned figures of Wisdom and Plenty in front. Overhead, a huge umbrella of silk and gold was fixed above the crimson velvet seats. Sweeping to the ground, and almost covering the huge ex-

panse of Lachman Prasad, was a veritable cloth of gold. The Viceroy looked down well pleased, as indeed he might on this great pageant which, in spite of all the criticism, he had brought to such successful issue. As for the Vicereine, words just fail me to say. I said when I set out that I wouldn't gush, but I believe I did make a few exceptions. Anyway, you must forgive an American for going a bit mad with pride when she sees one of her fellow country-women riding into Delhi on an elephant as Vicereine, preceding even the brother of the King. And such a Vicereine! That was something for an American to have done. We are a republican people, but we have not quite forgotten that we sprang from a kingdom, and perhaps it is just because we are new that we cherish such a secret affection for the old.

Following the Viceroy came another magnificent state elephant carrying the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and about their welcome and popularity there was no possible manner of doubt whatever. The natives were frightfully keen to see the King-Emperor's brother, and none who saw could have been disappointed with the genial kindly man who acknowledged so graciously the plaudits of the crowd. They say a native crowd never cheers. That may be true. But if they don't know what a good ringing British cheer is, their spontaneous exclamations of delight as the King's brother passed by were no less unmistakable. It seemed like one long audible indrawing of the breath, a full deep sound fraught with tremulous excite-

ment, that surged through the crowd and passed along the lines like some mighty wave that, gathering from a low and distant murmur into a roar of sound, breaks and ebbs back to gain fresh strength to break and break again.

Behind came the ruling chiefs, all glorious in apparel, as if they had just walked straight out of the Song of Solomon. Two and two they passed by on their elephants, the great chiefs of Hyderabad and Mysore heading the procession. Every conceivable colour was there. Even the elephants bore quaint figures and symbols painted in fantastic guise on their rough black heads and trunks. As for the jewels, they were enough to drive the wealthiest woman of the West green with envy. And the way those princes carried themselves! That, too, might be envied by the men of the West. This to them was no mere show and pageant. They in their pride had come from afar to escort the representative of their King-Emperor, and to pay him homage. It was right that it should be fittingly done. The Oriental takes even his pleasure solemnly, and this was an occasion in which all the dignity and pride of every day life found its epitome. The Nizam of Hyderabad, clad in sober black, but with a glorious diamond aigrette glittering in his yellow turban, was the very embodiment of stateliness. The young Maharajah of Mysore, who rode beside him, was resplendent in gold brocade, diamonds in his turban, and a superb necklace of big pearls and ruby pendant. After that I lost count. Each one seemed more mag-

nificent than the last—a glory of silk and satin and velvet, of gold and silver, of diamonds and emeralds and pearls and rubies—a veritable glittering dream of the fabled wealth of Ind. One grew confused and bewildered with it all; one's brain refused to follow and take in all that the dazzled eyes rested upon. The glorious blue of the Eastern sky, the dark red line of the Fort for far-off background, the strange, many-coloured crowd, swayed by excitement such as had not been in Delhi for more than a generation, the slowly-pacing line of majestic elephants carrying their gorgeous burdens, all made up a bewildering picture that even one's imagination could scarcely have conceived. Here at least was nothing of the West, nothing of the twentieth century. Just such men as these, clothed as they were, riding with the same superb arrogance, it might be in the very same howdahs, might have graced the triumph of the greatest of the Moghul Emperors. Nothing was changed. Here was a pageant to delight the heart of a lover of the past.

Then again the scene changed. The great chiefs had passed, ending up with the dear little Shan chiefs with their wonderful pagoda hats, and one of them with the charming little princess Tip Atila, his sister, sitting by his side. The gorgeous feast of Oriental colour was over, and straightway one was back in the West again—the land of ugly headgear and frock coats. The Grand Duke of Hesse, who looked to be thoroughly enjoying himself all through the festivities, came by in a carriage and four, followed by Governors, Lieuten-

ant-Governors, and a host of other officials, Lord Kitchener riding his famous charger Democrat in the midst of them. Then back with a jump to the East again—a crowd of wild Baluchi and North-west frontier chiefs, more Bengal lancers, and finally the motley crowd of retinue elephants which had been waiting on the Champs de Mars until all the rest of the procession had passed by. They were picturesque and quaint beyond description, loaded, one would think, with everything in the way of decoration that their owners possessed piled on pell-mell—a medley of magnificence.

It was over at last, and one went away bewildered, half-wondering if it were not all a dream, some mirage of the East that one had seen under a magician's wand. Even Berengaria still sat silent, seemingly plunged in thought.

'It was wonderful,' was all she said as we drove home. 'I just want to go away quietly and try to realise it.'

'It was wonderful to think how well the elephants behaved,' said the practical John. 'If they had taken it into their heads to stampede one's imagination reels at what might have happened.'

'Only to think,' said Berengaria, looking at me solemnly as we reached home, 'only to think that it was an American from Chicago who rode at the head of all that !'

CHAPTER XV

AN ECHO OF GREAT DAYS GONE BY

BERENGARIA tells me that that last chapter is too much like a guide-book. It gives away my nationality at once, she declares, for she, like the rest of her race, believes that the love of guide-books is deeply implanted in every American heart. It may be ; I can't say. Anyway, I admit it is in mine. I like to take an intelligent interest in everything, and see all that there is to be seen. Of course, if you can get a man to show you round it is better, but you won't often find a man anything like as informing or intelligent as a guide-book. Anyway, I am not writing a guide-book now, so I will take Berengaria's advice, and shun anything in this chapter in the way of facts, dates, and figures. I will take to lecturing the British public instead. They tell me that the British public likes being lectured, and pays you well for doing it. We shall see just now.

I believe I warned you somewhere that I was bound to cry once more before this book ended, and I am going to do it now, all in a little chapter by

itself, at the same time that I upbraided the British public. You may think that there was not much to cry about at the Delhi Durbar. But there was, and lots of people did it and were unashamed. Even Berengaria, who is not at all that kind of person, got frightfully sniffy and blurred about the eyes.

We had watched them for over an hour—an endless stream of carriages of state, ablaze with all the glory of the East, each one seemingly more gorgeous than the last as one by one they deposited their princely occupants at the steps of the great amphitheatre, where they had come from every corner of the Indian Empire to pay homage to the first King-Emperor, whom all acknowledged. India in all the countless ages of her history, could have seen no sight like that—magnificent state coaches, dazzling glass, or silver and gold, upholstered in every conceivable colour in velvet and satin and silk, splendid teams of horses gorgeously caparisoned and weighed down with trappings and cloth of gold, running footmen as in days of old in state liveries with maces of gold and ebony and silver, and within the coaches the scions of the proudest sons of Ind. It was wonderful.

Suddenly, above the clatter of dangling swords, the prancing of horses' feet, and the stately greetings of chiefs, a clear bugle-call rang out. We hurried to our places, and as if by magic the crowd melted from the great arena within, leaving it bare for the coming spectacle. The huge mass of people on the surrounding seats swayed like a field of

corn blown by a capricious breeze as each one sought his place. Gradually the rustling ceased. It subsided and all was still. It grew so still that one could feel the silence. That extraordinary feeling that we of the West seldom experience, but that many a native race, living akin to nature, knows full well—that sixth sense fraught with mystery—seemed suddenly to awake and hold us tense with expectation. Something was coming—something unexpected, something that would move us strangely. Silently we sat waiting, our nerves strung painfully. Then the whisper passed. They were coming. Not the Viceroy, not the brother of the King-Emperor, not the splendour and glory of the East, nor the might of the West in the heyday of its pride. They were coming! One heard the strains of music that accompanied them before they came in sight. ‘See the Conquering Hero Comes.’ Why was it that one’s pulses leapt within one and one’s eyes drew dim? And then they came, straggling, in no attempted order, some in uniform and some in mufti, they came, just a band of feeble toil-worn men, old and bent and weary, disabled, crippled, maimed, but, above all, triumphant, the Heroes of England’s day of need—of England’s day of victory—the veterans of the Mutiny. At their head marched the band of the Munster Fusileers, the old 101st Foot, which had fought so gallantly at their side. It was the same regiment, with the same traditions, but it was a new and younger generation of men who played the heroes in to-day, and their strength and vigour contrasted strangely

with the utter weakness of the little company that followed them, striking an added note of pathos. Slowly they marched round the huge arena, slowly because they were old and the light of life burned low. It seemed almost as if some of them would never accomplish even that short journey. Something seemed to rise up and catch one in the throat as one watched. No moment in all my life has been quite like that. One felt as if one must cry out, as if one must break down and sob for very sympathy and joy and pride. They were the remnant, all that was left in India of those who had passed through the fire of Delhi and Lucknow—of those who had helped to save the Empire.

In the forefront marched the little band of Europeans, only twenty-seven of them. Behind, more pathetic still by reason of their great loyalty to another and once alien race, the company of Sepoys, only three hundred and eighty-seven strong all told. They were in every variety of costume. There was no attempt to march them round to their seats on the furthest side in anything like order. They were just left to come as they would. And it was just that that moved one most. It was the utter contrast to everything that had gone before, and that was to come after. Strength, precision, pomp, discipline, these had been the watchwords hitherto. Here there was neither one nor the other—only a great appalling weakness, a pathetic reminder of the strength that once had been. With quick, spontaneous unanimity the whole assembly rose to its feet, and then, brokenly at first, as if

men scarce trusted themselves to give vent to the emotion that held them, from every corner of the vast amphitheatre came the ringing cheer on cheer that only a British crowd can give. Truly, the music spoke true. They were the conquering heroes. The well-known air could be played more worthily for none than for these. And then, as they were half-way round, opposite the daïs where the Viceroy would sit, the music changed. They were nearing their seats. The few brief moments that they had held us all enthralled were passing. If any eye was still dry, the old familiar air, with its many memories, that now struck up, must have blurred its sight at last. 'For Auld Lang Syne.' One saw them moving onward through a mist. One was back with them before the gates of Delhi out there beyond along the ridge. One was with them through those terrible months in the Residency at Lucknow. All the glory and pageantry of an Emperor's coronation faded out of sight. One was back with them bearing the brunt and the heat and burden of the day, fighting a hand-to-hand fight of life and death for England. With a rush of feeling one realised that it was to them, to that small band of old and crippled men, and to the many whom they represented who had passed away, that we owed the triumph of to-day. They had come through much tribulation, but they had come to bring us this to-day. Without them, if they had not sacrificed themselves for Empire, there could have been no coronation of the King in his Imperial City.

Oh, English hearts, how is it that you can forget ! I would that every one of the millions who glory in the name of Briton might have been gathered from every quarter of that glorious Empire on which no sun can set to see that remnant of its fighting days pass by. There could have been no heart that would not have been stirred. For none who saw can forget. Would that I had the pen to paint it in words that might bring home its power to those to whom it was not given to see. Pride of race is a good thing for a nation. England has so much of it in one way and so little in another. I have lived years in England, and I might scarcely have known that you ever possessed such a place as India at all. You have so little enthusiasm. I don't want you to shriek and gesticulate. That would be un-English. But do know something about and take an interest in and be proud of your great Indian Empire. Is this small band of heroes nothing to you as it passes by ? Do you ever think what it would have meant if you had lost India ? Impossible, you say ; but what would have happened save for the loyalty of the native troops ? And this feeble little company passing by represent all that is left of them. Surely if the great heart of England knew, it would go out to them. But you Englishmen are so dreadfully hard to rouse. For fifty years those men who did so much for you have been growing old, poor, unnoticed, with but scant honour and respect. That was half the pathos of it as one watched them marching by. It was as if one brought from some old time cabinet a

worn and faded memory of the past. These feeble tottering men, so forlorn, so helpless, seemed to have been unearthed from some long-forgotten tragedy. About them clung so little of the triumph of the victory that had been theirs. How had they spent the intervening years? For them the present and the future seemed to hold so little. They heard at last the shouts and acclamation of the cheering crowd. But it was so pathetically like a recognition that had come too late. What a rush of thoughts must have crowded in upon them as they played their little part in the proclamation of the King! What strange emotion must those cheers have raised in those long-forgotten hearts. Appreciation, recognition, gratitude in full measure—at last. It was not for these they fought. But to have given so much and met with so little in return. It was not even for their native country that these men had fought. It was for the great Queen of another race beyond the seas—the mother of men—to whom they had sworn allegiance, and to whom they had remained so true. But now at last, after well-nigh fifty years, the best and greatest in the land, the representatives of the world-wide British Empire, hailed them conquerors, and threw their tribute of gratitude and acclamation at their feet.

‘For Auld Lang Syne.’ The march round the arena was nearly done. And it was well, for even that short journey was all too long for some. The oldest and the weakest had fallen gradually behind, and many there were who would not have reached

the end but for the stronger arms stretched out to help them. One old man, bent and crippled beyond belief, clung for support to a veteran only one degree less frail on either side, and even then his feet dragged wearily and his body tottered as they led him slowly on. Only his eyes seemed to live, fixed, but alight, heedless of the cheering crowds, like the eyes of one who saw visions. Tears rained slowly down the face of another, emotion finding vent in the frail body that had long since spent its strength and vigour. And so, leaving us with hearts strangely moved, they passed, and joined the great throng that waited to hail the first Emperor of the great Empire they had done so much to found.

Far off like distant thunder comes the sound of the first salutes. A stir of expectation, the rattle of rifles as the long lines of troops come to the salute, the flash of swords and the jingle of accoutrements as the escort flashes by, and the Duke and Duchess of Connaught have arrived. Now as always there is no mistaking their popularity. Englishman and Indian vie with one another to give them welcome. Again a pause, and the Viceroy comes. The great historic Durbar has begun. The silver trumpets sound at the entrance and the herald enters as if from some gorgeous picture of the days of chivalry. In front of the dais the great black horse stands like a rock, unmoved by the rattle of musketry, the waves of cheering, or the deep startling notes of the salutes. Stately, magnificent, he plays his part, proudly arching his neck and

tossing his head to let the sun gleam on his coal-black mane and swaying plumes. Then upon the dead silence—the impressive silence of a waiting multitude—rings the herald's voice proclaiming the King-Emperor. We strain our ears to catch his every word. Then the salutes. We sit in silence, listening. One hundred and one guns boom out across the plain. 'God save the King.' Twice after the *feu de joie*, the inspiring strains ring out from the massed bands beyond. Each time they bring a rush of pride and exultation as the vast assembly rises to its feet. Never before had I realised the full impressiveness of that national hymn. Played like that in those surroundings, one heard it with other ears. But too often it is nothing more than the signal for departure, the hurried putting on of cloaks, the murmuring of the last words of farewell. Here one stood listening tense and eager, greatly moved by what had passed, and waiting for that which was yet to come. Could there have been one in all that great throng who was not stirred to the very depths? All that there was of loyalty in one seemed to rise to meet those clear, triumphant, acclaiming notes as they rang out upon the quivering listening air. 'Victorious, happy, and glorious.' Was there a heart that did not respond? 'God save the King.'

Then the Emperor's message, listened to with breathless interest, and the Viceroy's speech, every word ringing out clear and true to the furthest limits of that vast amphitheatre. Then, turning towards us, the Herald called to us to take our part in the

acclamation of the King. 'Three cheers for the King-Emperor!' and our pent-up feelings found relief in those deep enthusiastic shouts that rose in quick unanimous response. Then in one long line they came—the Princes of the East from every corner of the vast Indian Empire, from far-famed Mysore and Travancore in the south to the wild Baluchi country in the north, from the remote Shan states on the outskirts of the Empire to the sandy reaches of the Persian Gulf—they came with words of loyalty on their lips to lay for the first time in all the countless ages of Indian history a common tribute at the same Emperor's feet. Nothing could have more impressed one with the strength and wealth and splendour of our Indian Empire than this. It was well to be an Englishman that day.

There was just one little scene more. The Viceroy and Vicereine had left the daïs, and the first gun of the royal salute was sounding as they stepped into their carriage and drove away. On the daïs for a moment the Duke and Duchess of Connaught stood alone. It was the last breathless pause, as we watched the closing scene before the end. Then with inimitable grace and dignity they turned slowly and bowed right and left to that vast assemblage. It was done so charmingly, so personally, as it were, that each one felt it as a gracious personal act towards himself, and the great concourse gave vent to its appreciation in one last roar of deafening loyalty and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME OLD FRIENDS AND SIR PETER TWEET

SOMEONE has eaten ham sandwiches in the Jumma Musjid. It doesn't sound very dreadful unless you know, and I guess the people who ate those ham sandwiches didn't know. But, as everybody says, they ought to have known. Fortunately, I am not a sandwichy sort of person myself, and I had sternly repressed Berengaria's desire to go armed to the State Entry with a nasty little paper packet of them. For all I know, that little paper packet may have contained ham. Anyway, it was lucky we left them behind, for I should never have felt quite the same again if I had eaten ham sandwiches in the Jumma Musjid.

You see, it was like this. Anything in the way of pig is Anathema to the Mussulman, who consequently knows nothing of the delights of ham, bacon, and pork. It's not a mere fast-on-Friday sort of thing: they are forbidden during all their lives to touch it. That's why I am so particularly glad I was not born a Mahomedan. If I was told that there was anything I must not eat as long as I

lived, I should at once feel that life was not worth living without a taste of it. I feel quite sure I should never be able to resist the temptation, and I guess I should succumb and eat it on the sly, and then despise myself ever afterwards, especially if I didn't like the taste of it. But still, when other people have prejudices, I always respect them. I don't believe in playfully dropping cockroaches on to people who have a horror of them, or jumping cats out of bags upon people who have a natural antipathy to them. I wouldn't go and kill a cow on a Hindu's doorstep, or give him beef in a mince under the name of mouton just for a joke. Consequently, I sympathised with the Mahomedans when they got angry because infidels had eaten ham sandwiches in their great Cathedral mosque. It was as bad as if a Mahomedan had gone into Westminster Abbey smoking a hookah, and I guess that would have made the Dean and Canons just wild. It seems that the Mahomedans objected to smoking in their mosque, too, and it was said that we should not be allowed inside again to see the fireworks on the following night as arranged. It was even whispered that the Viceroy was advised not to go. So great was the religious indignation supposed to be that the officials were actually afraid for his safety. 'I am going,' is reported to have been the Viceroy's characteristic reply to the chief of police, who gave the warning. 'You will be responsible for my safety.' Which must have comforted that official greatly.

It was while we were at the polo that afternoon,

discussing the possibilities that might happen, that I suddenly spotted the three old ladies of my eventful train journey from Bombay to Bandalpur. I don't think I should ever have known them if there had not been three of them together. It was quite evident that they belonged to that large class of English people who believe in wearing their very oldest and shabbiest clothes when travelling. At the polo they appeared really beautifully dressed. They were not even dressed alike, as they had been on the journey, though, of course, being so much alike, and three together, they could not help being a bit quaint. I looked out anxiously for that nephew. When I couldn't see him anywhere round I began to feel real murderous. I looked at those three dear old aunts again. They were sitting in a row, sweet and simple, and delightfully contented with themselves. Surely they would not look like that if a nephew had treated them badly. But still, they were probably a good forgiving old trio, and perhaps love made them blind; but if I found that that nephew had made an excuse to desert them, and was skittling round the corner with some pretty girl or other, I would find him out, and give him 'a piece of my mind,' as Ermyntrode would say.

After one of the chukkers I went over and spoke to them. They purred with pleasure when they saw me, and were delightfully demonstrative. Now I admit it, I love being purred over, and the future looked black for that nephew if he had wounded the feelings of these dear old aunts.

'We wondered in which camp you were,' purred

Martha, holding my hand, and smiling all over her dear kind old face.

‘We are so pleased to see you again,’ chirped Jane, trying to possess herself of that same hand.

‘You must come to see us,’ said Anne, and she put her hand upon my arm persuasively.

I really was glad to see them again, and I said so. I hate people who really are glad to see you, and don’t tell you so. And then I mentioned their nephew.

‘Oh, our nephew!’ exclaimed Martha, with a little comic despairing motion of the hands.

‘Yes, what do you think?’ smiled Jane mysteriously.

‘The very reason of our coming out to India, too,’ laughed Anne.

‘What happened?’ I asked, relieved, knowing from their manner that, though something had happened, yet all was well.

‘What do you think?’ said Martha. ‘We found on arrival at Mehernugger that he had just left for home.’

‘He was evidently going to give us a surprise, and so had not written,’ supplemented Jane.

‘Just in the same way that we were going to surprise him,’ said Anne.

A dreadful horrible thought entered my mind. Had my telegram really done that?

‘So we have passed one another on the way,’ Martha was saying, disappointed, but quite happy and amused.

‘It was all our fault for not telling him we were

coming,' confessed Jane in the manner of one confessing a sin she was really rather proud of.

'But we did so want to give him a surprise,' pleaded Anne, still quite confident of the welcome that would have awaited her had that nephew been at hand.

'They say great minds think alike,' I said gaily. 'and there you were both thinking of giving one another a surprise at the same time.'

It was a great temptation to ask them when that nephew had left Mehernugger. They had said that he had just started for home. Could that mean two days before they arrived? After he had received my warning telegram? Could leave be obtained in a short space of time like that? I wondered greatly. But evidently the aunts were unsuspicious, and though I was real curious to know if it was my telegram announcing their arrival that had sent their nephew flying straight off home, I forebore. I wouldn't for the world have aroused suspicion in those dear contented minds, so I gave that unknown young man the benefit of the doubt. He had not hurt the feelings of the three old ladies whatever he had done, and that, after all, was the main thing. What does it matter if people hurry down a side street to avoid me when they see me coming if I don't see them do it? It's only when they let me see them in the act that I get annoyed. Ignorance is always bliss, so perhaps, after all, my telegram had opened out a way of escape that had not crossed my mind at the time I sent it off.

I often sat with those dear old ladies watching

the polo after that. Nobody really watched the polo, except a few enthusiasts, and a few others who thought it good form, and kind of sporting like, to simulate an enthusiastic interest in it. But to me it was a perfectly fascinating sight. The smooth, green polo-grounds might have competed with Hurlingham, and not been ashamed, while as for the games themselves, the competition for the Viceroy's International Cup, open to the world, brought together some of the finest teams you could wish to see. The final between Alwar and Jodhpur was grand, the Maharajah of each State playing for his side, and great was the enthusiasm for the winning team, not so much because it was Alwar, as because it had come out on top after such a splendid and well-fought fight.

We saw the fireworks from the Jumma Musjid after all, in spite of vague prognostications. It was there that I met Sir Peter Tweet.

'He's one of the Government of India curiosities,' Berengaria whispered to me just before she introduced him. I am not sure that I should have let Berengaria introduce him if I could have prevented her. But I hadn't time. He was a man with a shaggy beard, and I've no use for men with beards of anykind. But he proved interesting as a curiosity.

He sat down beside me, and I saw at once that he was worried and nervous about something.

'I can't think why I came,' he said plaintively, as we watched the rockets and sprays and wonderful huge Katherine wheels.

'To the fireworks?' I asked, surprised at his

dismal tone. I was rather enjoying them. I always like things like fireworks—bright and fizzy and beautiful and not too long.

‘To Delhi,’ he said, and positively groaned about it. ‘To Delhi in general and to the fireworks in particular.’

‘You can’t think why you came to Delhi?’ I repeated, looking at him to see if he really were serious. He certainly was original. Everybody I had met hitherto had been lauding everything up to the skies. Sir Peter Tweet was the first man I had met who didn’t know why he had come.

He turned and looked at me solemnly.

‘It ought never to have been allowed,’ he said ponderously, as if he were delivering judgment. ‘It ought never to have been allowed. It’s a positive danger to human life.’

‘Which?’ I exclaimed, ‘the Durbar or the fireworks?’ He had such a weighty manner with him that anybody imaginative like me began to feel danger to human life hovering about in the air all round one straight away.

He waved his hand over the Champs de Mars.

‘Could anything be more dangerous than that?’ he asked impressively, ‘or than this?’ waving his hand over the orderly, highly respectable crowd of spectators in the Jumma Musjid. A huge rocket went off with a whizz that positively made me start.

‘But why?’ I exclaimed, battling against the growing conviction that somehow it must be very dangerous if Sir Peter Tweet said it was. If the Government of India listened to his words with

reverence, who was I that I should disbelieve? Suddenly a magnificent display of golden light illuminated the whole scene. The effect was weird, glorious, never to be forgotten. The crowd, dense-packed, a seething mass of humanity betrayed into emotion beyond their wont, gesticulating, exclaiming, filled the vast space below, and stretched in one unbroken mass, a sea of heads, right up to the ramparts of the Fort outlined against the sky beyond.

‘Ah!’ Sir Peter drew a deep breath. It reminded me of the exclamation, half of wonder, half of awe, that a little boy gives out of the darkness at a Sunday school treat when a limelight picture is suddenly thrown upon the screen.

‘Now do you understand?’ he asked. Suddenly the golden lights shot high up into the air, hovered a moment, and then, falling quickly, one by one, went out. Below was nothing but the darkness. The scene that had stood out clear as day a moment before seemed nothing but a picture of the brain. It was fascinating.

‘Just think what it would be like to be down among that crowd!’ Sir Peter’s voice sounded melodramatic in the darkness. I laughed nervously.

‘But we are right up here out of its way in the Jumma Musjid,’ I said, determined not to be depressed.

He looked at me again impressively.

‘I think of the two we should be safer down below in the crowd,’ he said.

A squib—not an ordinary squib, but magnified

fifty times like everything else at Delhi—seemed to shoot out straight for the place where we sat.

Sir Peter leaned over towards me mysteriously.

‘Have you not heard of the ham-sandwiches?’ he asked in a whisper. ‘Have you heard nothing of the fanaticism of the East? Do you think they are going to let a thing like that pass unavenged? Think what they could do. Practically all the Europeans are gathered here to-night. They could wipe us out with one stroke.’

I shuddered. It would be so unpleasant to be wiped out. I looked round for Berengaria and John, but they had disappeared. There was no help for it. I had to listen to Sir Peter Tweet.

‘Think of all that vast crowd,’ he went on. ‘Think of what it contains. All the worst scoundrels in India are probably collected there. They would have to sacrifice their Jumma Musjid, but what would they care for that compared with the havoc they could work among the infidels? And think of the loot they would find in our tents after they had blown us up? Isn’t that temptation enough alone, even leaving aside the ham sandwiches?’ He leaned closer to me and spoke slowly and impressively. ‘It wants only one fanatic or one scoundrel among all that vast crowd to do it. One man unaided could wipe us all clean out.’

I shuddered again. I felt like a figure on a slate with a nasty damp sponge hanging over me.

Again a mass of changing light shot up into the air, making everything clear as day in wonderful tints of red and blue and gold. It seemed in some

strange mysterious way to bring Sir Peter's gloomy forebodings within the range of possibility. One long gasping exclamation of wonder and delight swept through the vast crowd, swaying it from end to end.

'But surely they are all loyal,' I said, trying to shake off the uncanny feeling that was taking possession of me.

'Loyal,' he repeated contemptuously. 'Loyal, it may be. But what does the loyalty of the crowd weigh against the one man who throws the bomb?'

'Oh, surely that is one of the things the native of India has not yet done,' I protested.

'It is merely a question of time,' he stated decisively. 'Eventually they will find out their strength. Then heaven help those of us who are still left here.'

We had nearly come to the end of the fireworks. They were showing portraits in fire—wonderful likenesses of the Viceroy and Vicereine, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and Lord Kitchener. They kind of gave me confidence. They were so very prosaic after those strange and fantastic displays of dancing, dazzling lights. But Sir Peter still harped on tragedies.

'Let alone actual premeditated violence, the danger is appalling enough,' he was saying. 'You never can tell what an Eastern crowd may do. Panic may suddenly seize it, or a wave of fanaticism sweep it off its feet and rob it of all self-control and reason. Or even given none of these things, hundreds may be trampled upon and crushed to death in the

darkness in the endeavour to get away when the show is over. To bring a crowd like that together is to court disaster. It is absolutely criminal.'

People were beginning to go, and I looked round hopefully for Berengaria. But I felt already that I should be kind of nervous and not sleep well that night.

'But nothing has happened yet,' I said, determined to be cheerful to the last.

'Ah,' he said, looking at me with a curious expression, 'ah, so people think. But they don't know.' He nodded his head mysteriously. I looked inquiry: He lowered his voice, and glanced round furtively. 'Dreadful things have happened,' he whispered, 'but—they've hushed them up.'

'But why did you come to Delhi if you think it is all as bad as this?' I asked as he helped me on with my cloak.

'Because I had to,' he whispered significantly. 'We were given no choice—we had to come. Native princes and Government officials, we're all alike, were simply dragged along at the chariot wheels.' His voice sank lower still and grew more mysterious. 'There are lots of us dying, dying of the cold, the fatigue, the anxiety, nay, some of us have died, but—they've hushed it up.'

Sir Peter Tweet himself looked so careworn and anxious that I became quite sympathetic.

'Oh, do take care. Don't die, Sir Peter,' I said.

'No,' he replied, 'no, I won't if I can help it, though it would serve them right. But I won't, because—they would only hush it up if I did.'

Just then Berengaria came up. Most of the people had already gone. But Sir Peter showed no signs of coming away.

'Aren't you coming?' asked Berengaria as we moved off.

'Not until the crowd has quite dispersed,' he said seriously. 'I will wait till then. The whole show is dangerous enough without unduly tempting Providence.'

So we bade him good night and left him there.

'Isn't he a curiosity?' laughed Berengaria as we went away. 'He's a perfect old woman, and gives himself a dreadful time imagining horrible things. He is the very last man who ought to have come to India. This country is a place where you are quite safe really, but where there are lots of awful things you can imagine if you are built that way.'

We found our carriage wonderfully easily considering the dense mass of vehicles that lined the roads, and we drove home without mishap of any kind through the good-tempered gossiping native crowd.

It was not until the day we were leaving Delhi that I saw Sir Peter Tweet again.

'I began to wonder what had happened to you and if you had ever got home from the fireworks,' I said.

He looked at me solemnly.

'You haven't heard?' he asked. 'You really mean to say that you haven't heard?'

Sir Peter, ridiculous as he was, had a wonderful way of impressing you at the moment.

‘No,’ I said, ‘what has happened?’

‘So you’ve never heard,’ he said, regarding me solemnly, tragically, reproachfully. ‘I ought to have known that they would do it. I’ve been very ill, and—they’ve hushed it up.’

And yet Sir Peter Tweet is one of the leading lights in the world of men!

That is one of the things that has puzzled me all through life. How is it possible for a man to be a leading light and a fool at the same time? Yet lots of people manage it. Sir Peter Tweet’s name is a kind of household word. He’s about at the top of the tree in his own particular line, yet look what an extraordinary individual he is when you meet him outside. And it’s just the same with so many other bright and shining lights that you hear so much about. They give you a dreadful shock when you first meet them. Of course, one does not expect very clever people to shine socially too, but still one does expect something. I guess even if you took the Front Bench and mixed them up with the other members, you would never be able to find them again unless you took very great care. But still, it is a great pity that more leading lights can’t be found in India who would still be leading lights even when you had dragged them out from the gloom of their secretarial offices.

There’s a good story told of one leading light who only shone at the office desk. He wasn’t exactly handsome and he knew it, and was sad. He was never known to look jovial or to smile, and his friends playfully called him behind his

back 'The Ugliest Man in Asia.' Well, a new leading light from home was arriving to join the select circle among the Simla snows, and all the other leading lights went out to welcome him. The ceremony over, they adjourned to the club, where India always does adjourn when the business of the day is over, and they one and all noticed a strange gleam in the eye of 'The Ugliest Man in Asia' that they had never noticed there before. He ordered a peg straight away—a thing he seldom did. He drank it off at one go and ordered another—a thing he had never done before. And then he actually beamed upon the other astonished leading lights.

'By Jove, old fellow,' they said, 'what's up?'

'Have a drink,' he cried—'have drinks all round,' he added recklessly—he who had never so much as given his dearest friend a 'split' before. 'Have drinks all round.'

Mechanically they took the drinks, and waited wondering.

'The Ugliest Man in Asia' raised his glass—his third.

'I've always doubted,' he said, and then he stopped and laughed and blushed all over. 'I've always doubted whether it was possible for anybody to be uglier than I am.' He stopped and laughed again, and slapped his knee. 'But, by Jove, I know now. I've seen him.'

But they tell me that public opinion was very much divided on the point, and that voting for 'The Ugliest Man in Asia' was quite a popular after-dinner game in Simla for quite a long time afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII

HE REALLY DOES PROPOSE, AND I AM HAPPY

I AM actually on my way home. You may think that a bit sudden, but you can't possibly think it more sudden than I do myself. I was to have stayed in India until the end of February, and returned home with Lady Manifold and Marjory, but—well, things happened.

You see it was like this. Berengaria and John and I had returned from the Great Durbar, and were slowly recovering from the strain and excitement of it in the peace of Slumpanugger. As the Scotchman said when they asked him how he felt soon after his wife was dead, 'It was verra dull but verra peaceful.' In a while we were to start on a camping tour, and Berengaria had a big party coming out to join us for a shoot. It was glorious weather—fresh clear air under a cloudless sky, and just for those few days one was content to sit all day under the trees in Berengaria's delightful garden idly revelling in the present, and dreaming lazily of things past and things to come. It was in that garden that it happened.

John had gone off to office, and Berengaria had driven to the station five miles away to meet the first of her guests who were due that afternoon. I was alone in the garden half dozing in a hammock, just gloriously content with the world at large and with myself in particular. One white-robed kitmatgar was bringing out a little wicker-table, and another followed with a tea-tray—a charming glimpse of snowy white and silver. That tea-tray just seemed to add the last touch of bliss to my content. The kitmatgar salaamed, ‘Cha taiyar, Miss Sahib,’ and retired. I lay looking at it, lazily revelling in the charming effect of the dazzling white and shining silver against the soft deep background of the turf that was Berengaria’s special pride.

I was so dreamily happy with things as they were that I scarcely noticed a ramshackle ticca ghari crawling up the drive. Have I told you what a ticca ghari is? You can’t fail to miss it if you ever go to India. It’s quite ubiquitous, and it never was new. It’s like some people who never were young. One isn’t told if Adam took Eve out driving in the cool of evening, but if he did it must have been in a ticca ghari, and the changeless East has carefully preserved the type of carriage ever since. It reminds you of a prehistoric peep in *Punch*. It’s a box—a very shaky box—on wheels—very shaky wheels, and you get in at the side. Sometimes the door opens, and sometimes it’s not made to do anything so advanced as that. In that case you have to climb over it, and it’s no good worrying yourself and trying to look dignified while you are

doing it. You must give up all thoughts of that, and turn all your mind to the safety of your hat and skirts. Say you get inside safely somehow without leaving a yard of frills caught on the step, it isn't all just plain sailing even then. It's only in a very superior ticca ghari indeed that you can sit up straight with your hat on. If you happen to be a stranger in those parts, and have guilelessly entered that ticca with a nice new aigrette on you'll simply have to sit with your head stuck forward, just as if you were going to butt the unfortunate young man who is probably crouched up opposite trying to keep his knees and feet out of the way of your skirts. Then you start, and that ghari shakes and rattles, and you bump about inside till your limbs feel kind of loose like a dancing doll's, and if that young man opposite will insist on talking it makes the strain worse, for you never can catch more than half he says on account of the exasperating rattle. Added to this the road is sure either to be very uneven and very full of unexpected holes or else of a stony hardness inconceivable. So if you can get out of that ghari looking fresh and spick and span, you must be one of the wonders of the age. You are generally so much upset when you do get out that you haven't any sympathy for the poor little rats of horses which have done so much better for you than their looks promised.

But I think, in spite of all its drawbacks, I shall always have a particular affection for the Indian ticca ghari, especially for the one that came rumbling and swaying and creaking up the drive that after-

noon. I could just see that there was someone inside as it drew up under the porch, but I was much too far away to recognise who it was. It was only a caller, I thought, whom the servants would send away, Berengaria not being at home, and I felt too absolutely happy and content with my own society just then to welcome anyone. Every prospect pleased, and ten to one if any man came along he would be vile. So I was just a bit annoyed when I saw the chaprassi coming towards me from the house carrying a card on a tray. I took the card carelessly, and prepared to look upon it with a frown. Then I suddenly sat up. Was it a joke? Could someone possibly be poking fun at me? I said 'Salaam' hastily to the chaprassi, and then I thought about my hair. I had been lying all the afternoon in the hammock, and I trembled to think of it. I scrambled into one of the wicker-chairs by the tea-table, and tried to look cool, furtively prodding and patting and trying to conceal recalcitrant hairs. If only I might have escaped inside for just two minutes! But that was impossible. Already crossing the lawn between me and the house was—Lord Hendley. I fortunately remembered that I have very expressive eyes, and busied them with the tea-things. But of course I had to raise them as he came up.

'Have I given you a surprise?' he asked smilingly as we shook hands. There was no mistaking the pleasure in Lord Hendley's eyes. Consequently I tried to make mine doubly innocent and blank. It's a mistake, and unnecessary to show a man

you are pleased to see him when you are quite certain he is pleased to see you. I determined to take it all as coolly as if he had just looked in to tea in Hill Street as he had so often done at home.

‘You have indeed,’ I said as casually as I could, with a whirl of thoughts as to the why and wherefore of his coming darting through my brain. ‘I had no idea you were in India. Will you have some tea?’

He laughed, his nice, clean, pleasant laugh. I suddenly realised how much I had missed it.

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘It’s a long way and very dusty between this and Berkeley Square, and I’m just dying for a cup of tea.’

‘What,’ I said, falling into his mood, ‘have you come straight here?’

He laughed again.

‘Yes, straight from Berkeley Square to Slumpnugger.’

I did so wish he would not look at me quite like that.

‘I’m so sorry Berengaria is out,’ I murmured.

He didn’t look at all sorry, but of course he politely said he was.

‘But she will soon be back,’ I informed him cheerfully, looking towards the long red drive as if she might be appearing any moment.

He looked decidedly sorry then. His smile died out, and I thought he actually seemed for a moment quite nervous. That gave me confidence straight away. If I see anybody else getting nervous, I always at once feel perfectly at ease. In the same

way if I see anybody unhappy, I'm sorry, of course, and I weep with them, but it gives me a real cheery feeling underneath to think that I'm at least happier than somebody else.

'It's a great pity you missed the Durbar,' I remarked pleasantly as I handed him a scone.

He relieved me of the plate, and carefully selected the most appetising scone before replying.

'Yes, it is a pity,' he replied as one who really didn't care a bit, 'but still there are other things to see in India beside the Durbar.'

He bit the scone in half with his nice strong white teeth, and smiled across at me as he did it.

'But you must go to other parts of India for sight-seeing,' I said. 'I am afraid there is very little to see in Slumpanugger.'

I caught his eye as I looked up, and felt myself blushing. I thought of that wretched boy Tony, and determined not to get 'beetroot' this time.

'Oh, I thought there was quite a lot to see here,' he said smiling. I did so wish he wouldn't sit and smile at me like that. It made me feel so horribly like a fly sitting opposite a spider. 'Isn't there a fort?'

'Oh yes,' I said disparagingly, 'there's a fort.'

'And some caves?'

'And some caves,' I admitted.

'And a mosque?'

'Several,' I said, 'but you find them everywhere.'

'And a ruined palace of the Moghul Emperors?'

he went on, quite regardless of my contemptuous attitude towards the sights of Slumpanugger.

‘I believe so,’ I said indifferently, ‘but I have not yet seen it.’

‘It will take me quite a long time to see all the interesting things in Slumpanugger,’ he said, as he gave me his cup for more tea.

‘Oh no,’ I said decidedly and discouragingly, ‘you can see them all in one day.’

‘Wouldn’t that be rather rushing it?’ he asked seriously. Anyone might have thought that he really was interested in the stupid old sights of Slumpanugger.

‘It would be a pity to linger over them too long,’ I advised, ‘since there are so many other sights so much more worth seeing elsewhere.’

‘I’m not at all sure I shall have time to see them,’ he said, smiling at me again as he took his replenished cup and another scone.

I wanted to ask him what he meant, and lots of things about his plans, but it’s such a mistake to let a man know you are curious about his doings. If you don’t appear curious he will want to tell you all the more. Lord Hendley at once told me something that I wanted very much to know without my asking him.

‘You see, I must be home for the beginning of the Session,’ he informed me.

‘Then I am afraid you won’t have very long out here,’ I said with an air of polite interest.

‘I have to sail next week,’ he said with a twinkle in his eye, ‘so I am afraid I shall have to defer my sight-seeing till another time.’

He had come out to India for a matter of

ten days just when the Durbar was over! It really must be coming at last. Yet how awful if I really were on the wrong tack. I felt 'cold and hot all over,' as Ermyntrude would have expressed it.

'How is the Duchess?' I asked, trying to appear as if I were thinking of nothing but her Grace's health.

'Quite well, thanks,' he replied, 'and, by the way, she sent you many messages and a letter.'

He pulled it out from the inside pocket of his coat as he spoke, and gave it to me. It was the kind of double-size envelope that the Duchess always uses, addressed in her large, great sprawling handwriting. It was sealed on the back with a dear little strawberry-leaved coronet. Surely that could only mean one thing. Surely it must be coming at last. Bless the man, why on earth didn't he speak out. Most men rush in head first, and blurt it out straight away. I had never met a man like this before who hung about and skirmished and seemed to enjoy lingering over it and protracting it as long as possible.

I toyed with the letter in my hands, my eyes upon it, wondering what its contents might be. Lord Hendley didn't speak, and I felt I positively could not look up and catch his eye just then. I grew desperate. Suddenly I jumped up.

'There's Berengaria coming back,' I said hastily, looking as if I heard the sound of wheels on the road. That did it. He jumped up quickly too.

'I love you,' he said.

I felt dreadfully guilty. What would he think when the carriage didn't come? I almost prayed that Berengaria might turn up, though I knew quite well that she could not be there for quite a little time yet. Still, whatever happened, he had done it at last. There was no getting out of that. My confidence revived. I turned and looked at him smilingly.

'How long have you done that?' I asked demurely.

'Exactly four months, nineteen days and some odd hours,' he said. 'I counted driving along in the ticca ghari.'

I laughed.

'You have been rather a long time telling me, haven't you?' I said reproachfully. What an extraordinary lover he was! Why, any other of the men who had proposed to me would have been acting in quite the orthodox fashion long ago if I had given them half as much encouragement.

'You see you have refused at least half a dozen men I know,' he defended himself comically. 'So I intended to make quite sure that I should not get "No" too. You see, I never have been refused yet.'

We both laughed. But still he never took me in his arms as I should have thought he would, and as they always do in books. I got piqued.

'And do you think you are quite sure now?' I asked, quite in the style of Lady Disdain.

He did come a step nearer then.

'I love you,' he said again with a delicious little

quiver in his voice. 'Couldn't you—couldn't you find it possible to love me?'

I gazed out across the lawn with unseeing eyes, quite like the heroine in the story-books.

'No,' I said sadly, quite as if my heart were elsewhere. 'No, I'm afraid not.'

Then I got a panic. What if he should take me at my word, and never ask me again. Men are such fools. I dared not look round. But Lord Hendley was more sensible than that. He didn't give me any time to think about it. He had done it at last. He was beside me seizing my hands, and looking down into my face.

'Look up at me,' he said fiercely. 'Look up at me and say that again.'

He was crushing my hands, and I gloried in his strength and his flash of anger. He was roused at last. I lifted my eyes to his, and gave up everything.

'I can't,' I said.

For the next few minutes I don't remember much. I recollect Aunt Agatha saying that men who restrain themselves longest are always the most violent when they do let themselves go. My future husband must be one of that sort. It makes me kind of afraid at times. They say love casts out fear. But I'm not sure. There is something just delicious in being a wee bit afraid of the strength of the man you love.

We got calmer after a few minutes, and I simply had to think about my hair again. A woman always has to do that even at the greatest crises in

her life. In fact, it's after a crisis like the one I had just passed through that she has to think about it most of all. There is nothing so hair-ruffling as a proposal that's accepted.

'I couldn't wait till you came home,' he said.

'That was sweet of you,' I murmured from somewhere about the lapels of his coat. He seemed to think it necessary to hug me and kiss me after everything I said. It was very nice.

'And I'm not going to let you go again.' It was delightful to hear the note of mastery and determination in his voice. Especially as I had no desire to be let go again.

'I came out on purpose to take you home.' I was much relieved. I had been so horribly afraid that he might suggest a nasty quiet little wedding out there. That wouldn't have suited me at all. One doesn't get the chance of marrying the heir to a Dukedom every day. When one does one likes to do it where all the other women can look on and envy you. Marrying a Duke on the quiet would be like hoarding up coin of the realm on a desert island—quite without satisfaction. Fortunately Lord Hendley did not propose that. I guess if he had I should have just had to give in. After all it's better to marry a Duke on the quiet than not to marry him at all. You mustn't think all this very calculating. It's just the way I'm built. I'm very practically minded, and although I was desperately in love I couldn't help common or garden everyday sort of things flitting about in the back of my mind behind the sentiment.

‘You can arrange to come home by the *Medusa* next week?’ he asked, holding me away from him to look at me again. His eyes just danced. ‘You can tear yourself away?’

‘Yes,’ I said, flinging away at one fell swoop all sorts of engagements for the six weeks to come. What does anything else matter when you’ve just made quite certain of a husband?

Then there really was the sound of wheels on the drive. We scrambled on to separate chairs, and I tried frantically to rearrange myself and look as if I hadn’t just been proposed to. But of course Berengaria, being a woman, saw and guessed, and the moment we were alone together I told her all that there was to tell.

‘Only to think,’ she said, looking at me thoughtfully with a new sense of my importance as she sat in my room that night, ‘only to think that you will be a Duchess without any trouble at all, whereas I,’ she sighed comically with a little shrug, ‘however much I prod John along, I can never hope in my wildest dreams to become anything more than a Lady.’

Ermyntrode received the news with no less wonder and delight.

‘Your Grace will sound so much better than Miss, won’t it, miss?’ she said, growing quite animated. ‘If only his Lordship doesn’t go and die before his father. What a pity that would be. We must pray that he doesn’t get attacked by any of the ninety-six diseases, miss—just as the little Shan chiefs at the Durbar said they prayed for the King.’

The next few days flew by. A lord, the son of a Duke, is a rarity in an Indian Mofussil station, and Slumpanugger was as anxious to see him as Berengaria was to show him off. Lord Hendley certainly saw all the sights. The Fort, the Palace, and the caves, we did them all—at least, we visited all the places, though Berengaria had an annoying habit of finding out when we got back that we had missed seeing the most important thing each time. Whereupon, of course, we expressed the greatest concern, but didn't really care a bit.

We were standing on the deck of the *Medusa* at last watching Bombay Harbour slowly beginning to recede from sight. Everything had been delightfully arranged. My dear nice Duchess of the *Arethusa* was chaperoning me, and everybody vied with one another to make things pleasant. Yet I couldn't help just a tinge of regret at leaving India. Great happiness had come to me there, and I had got to love the place for its own sake, short as my stay had been.

'I think I shall know what it means to hear the East a-callin',' I said softly, watching the glorious sweep of coast and clear blue-green waters of the bay as they grew fainter and more miniature-like in the haze of distance. 'I just love India. We must come back some day.'

'Yes,' he said, but I don't believe he was thinking about India at all just then, and he wasn't even looking at the last fair picture of her that was rapidly fading away.

Wherever I am I think I shall always feel in my

heart the mysterious subtle influence of the East. Wherever I am if I close my eyes I shall see it again. There will flash past as in a dream the long bare dusty roads, with their fitful flow of traffic crawling lazily beneath the blinding midday sun in a cloudless sky, the heavy ponderous carts creaking as the bullocks with mild complaining eyes sway drowsily from side to side, and the driver sleeps at his post ; the tiny mud-built straw-thatched village, a jumble of huts, creeper-grown, crouched in the shade of the palm ; the little brown urchins rolling in the sun and the dust, naked and unashamed in a row of beads or a single string round the waist, tied, as the mother will tell you, to warn the child when he has eaten his fill, and more will bring remorse ; the silent women in their bright gay saris, with their own inimitable grace returning from the well, their water-pots poised easily upon their heads or quietly preparing the evening meal against their lord's return ; the sweet all-restful sound of the cowbells along the slopes of the hills as the cattle wend their homeward way, the deep, low musical notes of the wooden bells answering the merry tinkling of the metal ones from hill to hill ; and the shimmering haze of the fleeting eastern twilight as the blood-red sun sets slowly in a blaze of gold and purple and orange and rose and green, and leaves the world to slumber. Even the smell of it all—the indescribable smell of the East—seemed to creep into my nostrils as I gazed my last at the receding coast, and drew me back to that mystic land.

And then the thought flashed across me. It

was an American woman who was vice-queen of it all !

I always felt that Lord Hendley could read my thoughts. He read them then.

‘ You would really like to come back ? ’ he asked, breaking in upon my reverie.

‘ Yes, oh yes, a thousand times yes, ’ I answered, looking round at him.

There was the light in his eyes that I love—the light that just goes straight away to the thing it wants and gets it.

‘ There’s been an American Vicereine once, ’ he said.

I think something must have leaped up into my eyes too.

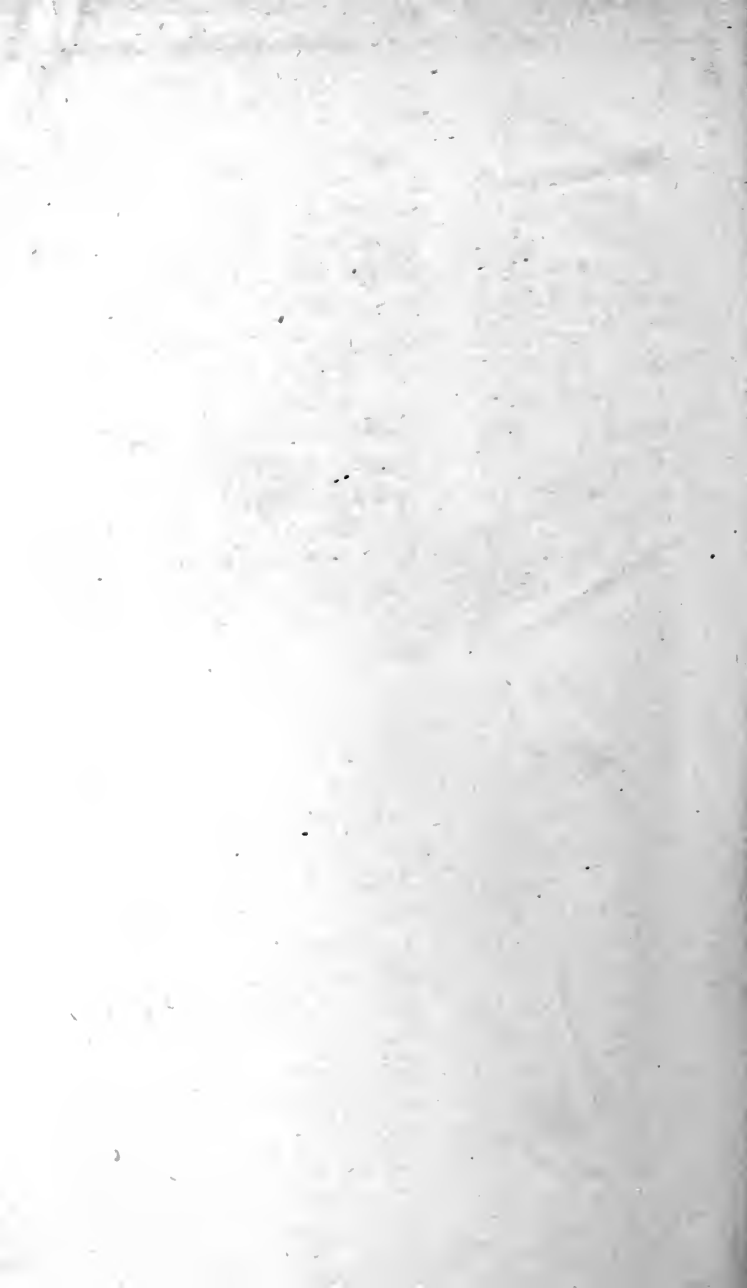
‘ Why shouldn’t there be another ? ’

Did he actually whisper it, or was it only my vivid imagination that spoke the words.

Anyway, I’m in love, and I’m going to be a Duchess. What could any American girl anywhere want more ? I guess it won’t be just my fault if you don’t hear of me knocking around again somewhere very soon.

THE END





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